VIRGINIA WILDLIFE

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Director's Column

William L. Woodfin, Jr

Lee Walker

Deer Management is Serious Business

If harvest numbers tell us anything, they demonstrate the importance and popularity of deer hunting in Virginia. During the past three hunting seasons the number of deer harvested and recorded at check stations has been nothing short of impressive. For the 1994-95 season, the statewide checked harvest figure was 209,373; for 1995-96 it was 218,476; for 1996-97 it was 207, 560. There is every indication that we will have another good season this year.

There are various reasons Virginia can offer great deer hunting opportunities, but certainly one of the most easily identifiable reasons is the state's deer management efforts. Here at the Department we take deer management seriously in order that serious sportsmen can have the most satisfying deer hunting experience possible. To that end, our wildlife biologists have been developing a new statewide deer management plan that will take us in the right direction.

We have been working on it for some time, and there is much to be done yet. Virginia has high quality hunting recreation and we have great respect for our wonderful white-tailed deer resource. With the effort put in by our top-notch biologists we anticipate that our plan will be the best it can be.

What goals will we strive for with this plan? Stakeholders are having their say, and public input meetings have been held to ensure that opinions can be heard and noted. A plan as ambitious as the Department's deer management plan must include the values—economic, sociological, and personal—of those who have an interest in shaping the plan. We have heard different opinions in various areas of the state, about whether they favor stabilizing, increasing or decreasing the herd in their physiographic area, and why they feel that way. The Board of Game and Inland Fisheries has approved the plan for the next round of review, and later this month a detailed summary will be available from our offices. The plan will be finalized next year. Public input, combined with our biological research, will provide us with a plan that serves the needs of the Commonwealth and ensure a deer resource for future generations

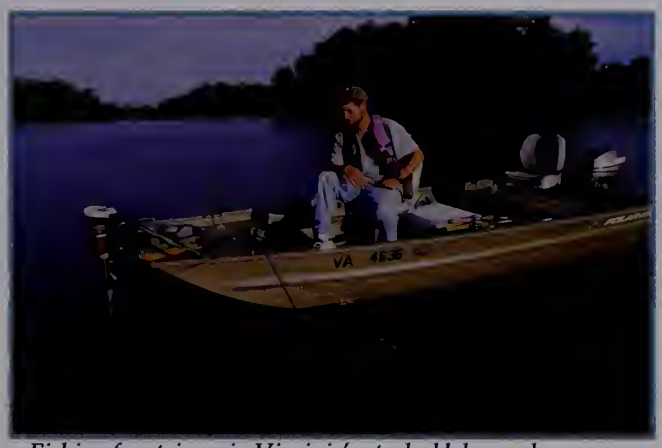
History shows us why careful planning is critical. From the first European settlements in 1607 until 1900 Virginia's white-tailed were over-harvested almost to the vanishing point. During the past few decades we have used many management tools to rejuvenate the herd. Some have been more effective than others, but the overall results of these efforts have clearly been positive. For the sake of our most popular game species we must plan for the future. It's a familiar saying, that if you fail to plan, then plan to fail. As Virginians, we cherish our history, and our history teaches us that white-tailed deer are more likely to flourish if we plan appropriately.

As for this season, mast conditions around the state appear spotty. Because this limits the places where deer are likely to feed, this uneven mast production should help some hunters find a good spot for their stand. Your pre-season scouting may have revealed the kind of daily pattern deer hunters hope to observe. However, I want you to know that a successful season includes more than bagging a deer. There is satisfaction in doing things the right way, and safety is always a top priority. Along with playing by the rules and being safe, to be in the field with friends or family members can be highly rewarding in itself.

On that note, let me remind our wildlife watching enthusiasts that in a few days Virginia will welcome the sixth annual Watchable Wildlife Conference to Roanoke. The program will be held at the Hotel Roanoke & Conference Center from November 11 through the 14th. Participants in the conference will be able to see what the Roanoke Valley has to offer for wildlife watching. The conference will provide much useful information, including ways to create wildlife viewing programs in our own communities. For some ideas on where to go to find the wildlife you want to see in the Roanoke Valley region, see our article on page 4 of this issue of Virginia Wildlife.

Mission Statement

To manage Virginia's wildlife and inland fish to maintain optimum populations of all species to serve the needs of the Commonwealth; to provide opportunity for all to enjoy wildlife, inland fish, boating and related outdoor recreation; to promote safety for persons and property in connection with boating, hunting and fishing.



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Dedicated to the Conservation of Virginia's Wildlife and Natural Resources

VOLUME 58 NUMBER 11

The Wilds of Roanoke

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There are things worth seeing in the wilds of the Roanoke Valley. Here, two wildlife watchers discover the value of the Fenwick Mines Wetlands Trail in Craig County, near the city of Roanoke. The background photo was taken from the Blue Ridge Parkway in Botetourt County.

by Emily M. Grey

Wildlife watching is rapidly becoming one of America's favorite pastimes. More than 90 million Americans travel annually to see and photograph animals. One can journey year-round to natural areas and enjoy native fauna and flora at minimal cost and in tandem with other outdoor pursuits, such as hunting and fishing.

This writer has explored wild America across this entire continent and nowhere is there a greater diversity of wildlife viewing and history than in Virginia. And, no region within the Commonwealth showcases its native species better than the breath-taking Roanoke Valley, the heart of the Blue Ridge.

Within an hour's drive of bustling downtown Roanoke there are more than 30 sites to observe native species. The enchantment of the vast Allegheny and Blue Ridge Mountains and its lush riparian valley make the Star City a sought after

of the Valley

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Outdoor recreation and sightseeing are always close at hand in the Roanoke Valley, and one of the main attractions is Explore Park, ***above****, in Roanoke.*

place to discover, revisit and live.

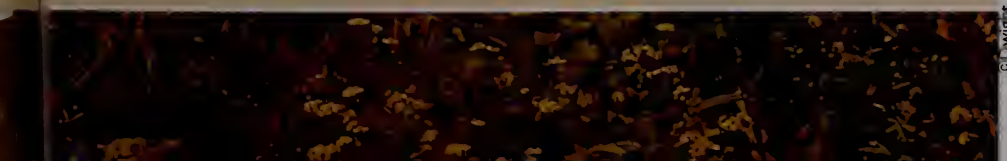
Initially established in 1825, Roanoke was called "Big Lick" after a nearby marsh where wildlife such as the indigenous white-tailed deer found plentiful salt licks. Not until the early 1880s, when it became the hub for the Norfolk and Western Railroad, was the populous city renamed. Today, Roanoke is deemed the historical crossroads of western Virginia.

Viewing areas described here have been divided into four quadrants. One can easily spend a day, weekend or longer in each of these vicinities. Although many of these attractions are closed during winter, select destinations are accessible. For additional information about these sites, you may consult the Roanoke Valley Visitor Information Center at (800) 635-5535 or (540) 342-6025.

To prepare for an outing bring all-weather apparel, a current detailed road map, insect repellent and reliable binoculars. Camera gear and spotting scopes will prove useful. Consult a field identification guide to learn about a particular species' daily, seasonal and habitat locations. And, be aware of hunting seasons and property signs.

"It is important that wildlife watching be seen as an economic development opportunity. A growing segment of national and international travelers is focusing on wildlife viewing. It is a very good way to attract tourists to any community while protecting its quality of life."

—Rupert Cutler, executive director of Western Virginia Land Trust and former director of Roanoke's Explore Park.



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South

Fifteen minutes from Roanoke and one mile off the Blue Ridge Parkway is 1300-acre *Explore Park.* This living history museum exemplifies an environmental and cultural site which attracts numerous tourists and local residents. You may ride in a horse-drawn wagon through an authentic 18th and 19th century western Virginia colony and participate in farmsteading activities while keeping time with the live bluegrass music. Be sure to watch for ospreys, herons, grebes, kinglets and cedar waxwings along the six miles of river-gorge hiking trails.

You will marvel at the valley's grandeur from atop nearby *Roanoke Mountain,* and observe how commerce and industry can exist almost 2000 feet below and wild creatures flourish close-by.

From spring's flame azalea and mountain laurel-framed woodlands through autumn's burnt orange-gold splendor, the parkway teems with wildlife. Early morning and

evening are the optimum times to observe animals. Park a vehicle at an overlook and scan the territory for woodchucks, deer, bobcats, owls and nighthawks.

Although the Parkway is often closed during winter because of treacherous traveling conditions, one can still view wild things amidst icicle-laden rocks and snow-blanketed summits. Cross-country skiing, sleigh riding and four-wheel drive vehicles are good ways to seek out evening grosbeaks, crossbills, dark-eyed juncos, loggerhead shrikes, snowy owls and other winter birds.

Further south on the Parkway is historical *Mabry Mill*. While strolling by the homemade still and other outdoor exhibits, listen and look for spring's harbingers. Many avian species such as goldfinches, robins, blue jays and mockingbirds are attracted to the flowing mill water.

When you exit off the Parkway on Route 8 south to Woolwine, you can follow the signs to two of Virginia's nine remaining covered bridges. Take a moment at Patrick County's *Bob White* and *Jack's Creek Bridges* to daydream of a slower-paced time and stay attuned for orange-rumped, square-tailed cliff swallows as they busily attend their nests beneath the bridges. If you scan the surrounding vegetation you might see tail-wagging Eastern phoebes, flickers, sapsuckers and purple martins.

Tucked away in the Blue Ridge's eastern foothills, 5321-acre *Fairystone Farms Wildlife Management Area* (FFWMA) offers prime birdwatching in its marshes and uplands. Look for what Virginia Tech professor, Doc Mosby, used to call "God's noblest gamebird." At any moment, the Divinity's own wild turkey, resembling a bulky cannon, may shoot across the forest air. And, FFWMA's oak-hickory-pine forests abound with squirrels, raccoons and deer.

Nearby 3000-acre *Philpott Lake*, established by the United States Army Corps of Engineers, offers excellent angling for largemouth and smallmouth bass, walleyes, crappies and bluegills. However, it's also good for wildlife watching. A bald eagle may be swooping above its familiar fishing ground. You may inspect the woodsy floor for burgundy-colored trilliums, bluebells and other wildflowers during your cautious descent down the precipitous trail to the monstrous dam and other riparian spots.

Families often enjoy collecting some of the legendary fairy stones (tiny, crystallized crosses) at adjacent *Fairy Stone State Park*. You might camp by the mixed woodlands and romp along the lakeshore at sunrise, and listen for three cheer(s) from the northern cardinal, Virginia's state bird, and multi-vocalizations of

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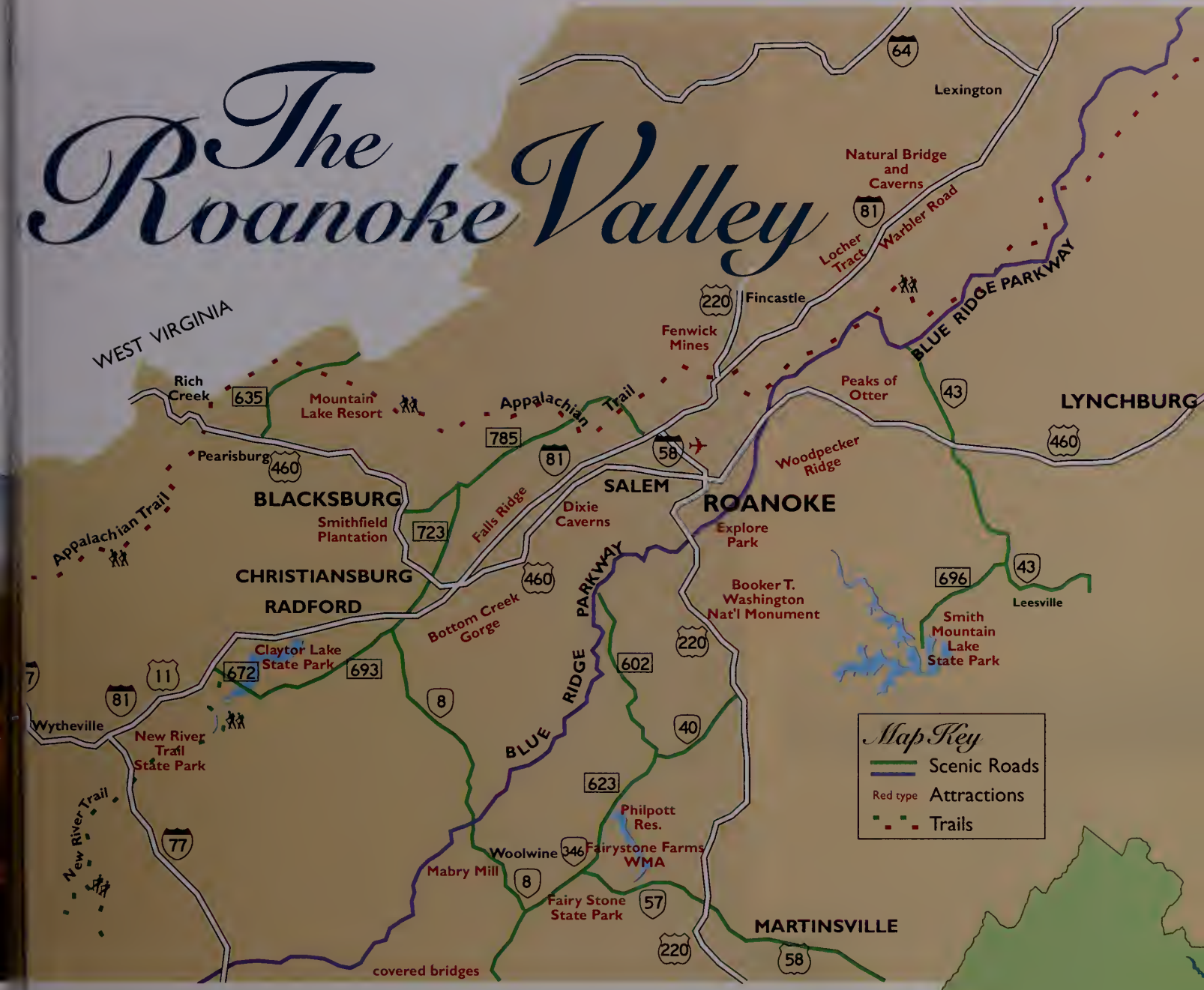
*Whether it's a view from a lake, bike trails or the majesty of the mountains, the Roanoke Valley has much to offer. **Top**, a Smith Mountain Lake dock in Bedford County; **left**, Claytor Lake State Park in Pulaski County; **right**, a view from Roanoke Mountain in Roanoke County.*

The Roanoke Valley



Opportunities for wildlife watching and outdoor recreation are available throughout the Roanoke Valley area, as can be seen from this bird's-eye view of the region. Map graphics by Pels.

chats, catbirds, sparrows, wrens and eastern towhees from coniferous and deciduous thickets.

Twenty-two miles southeast of Roanoke lies the 224-acre *Booker T. Washington National Monument*. There you can stroll back in time through a reconstructed tobacco plantation replete with craftworkers and farm animals, and get a good look at the sprawling split rail fencing encompassing much of this appealing Piedmont stopover.

The predominantly yellow poplar-red maple woods is believed to be similar to the way it was during Washington's childhood. Perhaps a serenading warbler, vireo, blue-gray gnatcatcher, yellow-billed cuckoo or a zebra swallowtail will appear from the winding Jack O'Lantern Branch Trail. You may want to check local farmland edges for bobwhite and indigo buntings.

Cross over to U.S. 460 and follow signs to *Smith Mountain Lake*, touted as the "Jewel of the Blue Ridge." It's Virginia's second largest freshwater body. There, at Smith Mountain Lake State Park, you can enjoy sailing, swimming, camping and spectacular fishing which includes March and June tournaments. Or, watch transient waterfowl and

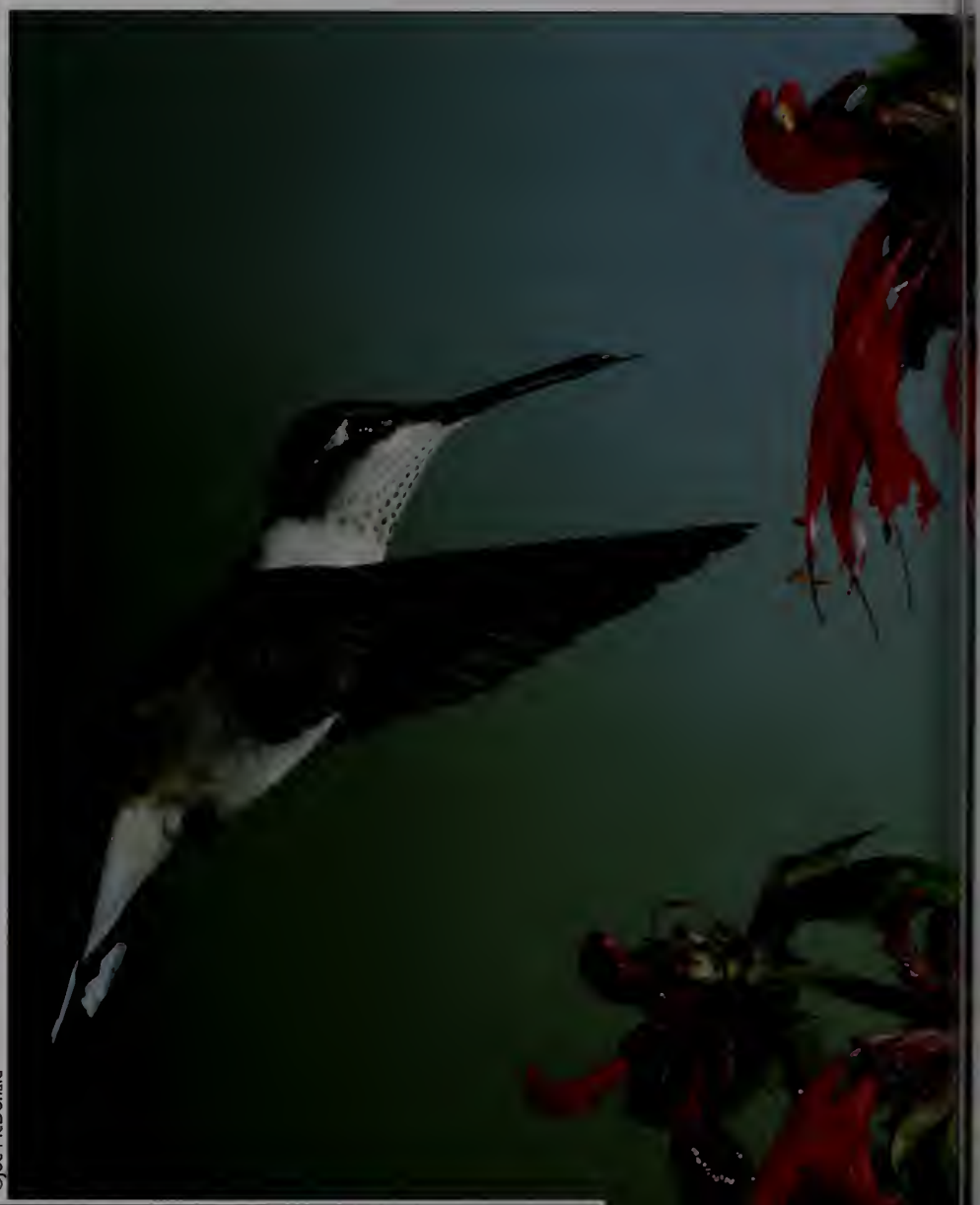
shore birds from a boat. Listen for the cohonk of Canada geese as they flap rapidly overhead in their distinctive vee formation. Even in winter turtles often sun themselves on rocks or fallen branches.

"Watchable wildlife attracts a certain market. Particularly a rural environment, which doesn't have or want a Busch Gardens, provides a wonderful setting to view unique wildlife. If planned and managed properly, this interesting activity can be an economic generator which a maximum number of people can enjoy."

—Charlotte Reed, Virginia Tech's Economic Development Specialist.

Approximately 20 minutes from downtown Roanoke, off I-81 south, you can find *Dixie Caverns*, an unlikely wildlife viewing post. This dark, cool moist environment is a welcome retreat from rainstorms or hot, humid days. During the 45-minute tour, keep a sharp lookout for miniature bats and salamanders. Notice the peculiar turkey wing formation near the end of your excursion.

Veer off the Ironto exit to The Nature Conservancy's 655-acre *Falls Ridge Preserve*, which rises from the Roanoke River's north fork. Trek



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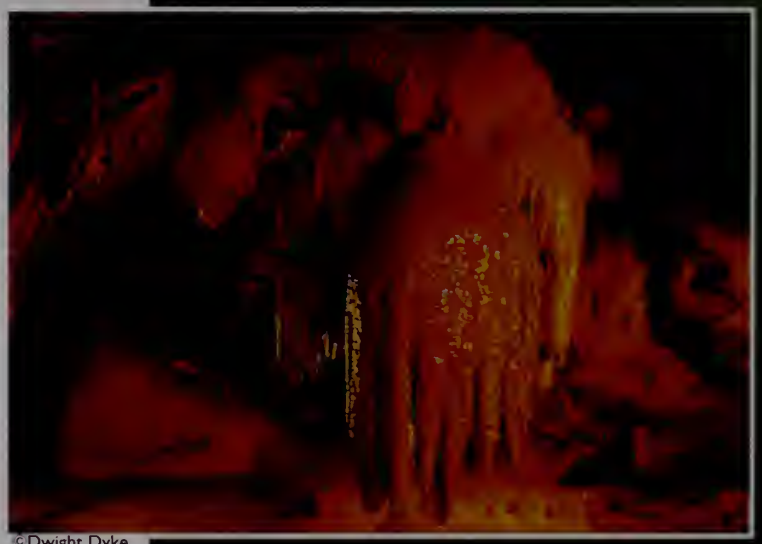

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*Ruby-throated hummingbird, **top**, and the well-known turkey wing formation in Dixie Caverns, Roanoke County. Right; Dixie Caverns, Roanoke County.*

up the rugged paths to spring-fed travertine waterfalls and compare Precambrian limestone with shale/sandstone at a geological fault. Search for rare wildflowers such as Allegheny plum, goldenseal and Addison's leatherflower and the wild cherrystone snail. To facilitate an exploration of this precipitous crest, contact the Conservancy's local manager at (540) 382-2220 or (804) 295-6106.

Bottom Creek Gorge Preserve is also owned and managed by the Conservancy. The powerful mountain stream forms a series of broad-basined waterfalls called "kettles." Don't miss *Bent Mountain Falls*, Virginia's second highest waterfall, and Puncheon Runn Falls, a lovely palisade of rock. At this 1657-acre tract one may see the Commonwealth's largest stand of virgin hemlocks. You can search for rare fish called bigeye jumprock, orangefin madtom, riverweed and Roanoke darters and the chestnut lipfern.

On the way to and from the Bottom Creek Gorge Preserve on Allegheny Springs Road (Route 637) there is an inviting little fishing hole. Older folks steal an afternoon and children play hooky in this hidden retreat. Nestled amongst lofty shade trees and a slightly rocky run-off, this South Fork of the Roanoke River is stocked with large and smallmouth bass and bluegill. So, cast a rod and unwind in the healthful surroundings.

Those with an interest in Virginia's past will want to visit Blacksburg's *Smithfield Plantation*, a Virginia Historic Landmark. This was the frontier home of Colonel William Preston, a distinguished surveyor and Revolutionary War leader. The lawn is an ideal place to set up an easel and capture the well-kept 18th century architecture of the dwelling, curtilage and multicolored butterfly and herb gardens. Tiny field sparrows from the abutting meadow and smaller chipping sparrows can be seen scratching about the flower beds for worms and insects. Remain alert for ruby-throated hummingbirds swarming to nectariferous plants.

And, now that you're so close to it, you should roam across the incomparable Virginia Tech campus.

©Rob Simpson

*A cedar waxwing perched on a chokeberry, **above**, and Bottom Creek Gorge, a Nature Conservancy Preserve, in Montgomery County.*

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There are horned larks, eastern bluebirds and meadowlarks to be seen in the extensive fields and orioles in the experimental orchards. Swan and other waterfowl drift lazily about a stretch known as the "Duck Pond."

Spend a summer's afternoon at panoramic *Mountain Lake*, lodged in the Appalachian Mountains. Enroute to Mountain Lake, take a dip at the Cascades. At this trickling waterfall, check for herptiles, yellowthroats and brown thrashers. At the Appalachian Trail's *White Rocks*, northeast of Mountain Lake, stare into the boundless horizon for raptors and their prey.

At Mountain Lake, listen and look for least flycatchers and more closely for hybrid black-capped and Carolina chickadees around the lake and surrounding woodlands. You might want to participate in Mountain Lake's Wilderness Conservancy Elderhostel or Appalachian culture programs, or accompany a local bird group on a nightly owl prowl. Perhaps a sauntering opossum, striped skunk, southern flying squirrel or bat will cross the path.

At designated turnoffs near Mountain Lake and Blacksburg one can go tubing, whitewater rafting and kayaking on the *New River*. Don't be surprised if a family of river otters float playfully by at a safe distance.

Approximately 30 minutes west of Blacksburg is idyllic *Claytor Lake State Park*. Enormous overhanging oak branches, glistening lake and historical buildings present a prime opportunity to practice nature photography. At any second a red-bellied woodpecker may waft overhead in undulating flight or a wily red fox may whisk by.

About 12 miles west of Claytor Lake is a trailhead of *New River Trail State Park*. Said to surpass any rails-to-trails in the nation, this 57-mile greenway extends along an abandoned railroad right-of-way. The path follows the picturesque New River for 29 miles. During a vigorous hike, horseback ride or cycle trip, be sensitive to wild inhabitants such as tanagers, redstarts, belted kingfishers and coyotes.

"Traditionally, wildlife only included birds and mammals. Nowadays, 'wild life' is any living wild thing including native plants, fish, nocturnal salamanders and cave-dwelling bats. This year's Watchable Wildlife Conference theme, 'Expanding Horizons,' addresses a diversity of views and viewers. It includes urbanites, handicapped persons and tourism professionals who can really promote wildlife watching. Virginia has beautiful historical sites and a diversity of views for everyone."

–Dr. Jerry Cross, Department of Fisheries and Wildlife Management.

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*Some recreations can be combined, as fishing and bird watching, **top**, along the James River in Botetourt County. **Above**, a look at Mountain Lake Resort in Giles County.*

"Few localities have recognized the potential for tourism that wildlife viewing promotions can generate. I hope that the Watchable Wildlife Conference (WWC) in Roanoke will be an awakening within the state, nation and region. I see WWC as a valuable tool by which local governments and the private sector can discover new program opportunities that hopefully will lead to exciting new initiatives at the local level. Such endeavors should lead to mutually beneficial partnerships among these groups, tourism agencies, and state and federal wildlife agencies."

–David Whitehurst, Director of Policy, Planning and Public Relations, Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries.

An enticing wildflower bridge, cedar flats and ponds can be found on Troutville's *Woodpecker Ridge*. Interspersed along a series of easy to difficult trails is a spruce and oak woods, bog and bluebird meadow. Visitors may spend the morning figuratively chasing dazzling monarch and tiger swallowtail butterflies, or zoom in on a red-tail or sharp-shin with a spotting scope from the hawk platform. You can also observe seasonal birds at marked feeding stations.

Indulge in a self-guided, intriguing environmental and historical interpretation at *Fenwick Mines Wetlands Trail*. Earthen dikes from this late 1890s to mid-1920s iron-mining settlement have created a moisture-rich ecosystem favoring prolific wildlife. This site is now owned and managed by the USDA Forest Service. It is an artificially-created area which has been left to mature naturally.

Listen for bird vocalizations from the upland oak-hickory forest. Follow the call gently with binoculars and focus on a pileated woodpecker drumming on a log or a ground-nesting veery sounding its flutelike notes. Step gingerly across the bridge into the swamp and spot frogs, salamanders, fish and snails.

Daring adventurers, grab backpacks and other essentials and tread along the astounding *Appalachian Trail*. From McAfee Knob to Carvin's Cove pay attention to signs of black bears, ruffed grouse, turkey vultures, eastern box turtles and hawks, particularly during fall migration. Gaze upon this wondrous mountain vista and know that life is never more magnificent than this.

Picture a chilly autumn day with the wind rustling through brilliant, frost-nipped leaves. What could be more appealing than a day hike along the Blue Ridge Parkway's *Peaks of Otter?* Blend in with the woodlands and relish the natural lake over a cup of steamy apple cider. Keep a lookout for ravens, tufted titmice, nuthatches and scolding chipmunks.

For the eclectic traveler, *George Washington and Jefferson National Forests* present the 378-acre *Locher Tract*. This former family-operated shale mining expanse offers a rare public glimpse of the historical James River from Rockbridge County. Look for waddling beaver and wood ducks in the bottomland ponds. Spread a blanket and picnic or update a journal on the spacious grasslands. You might survey the meadow edges for small, upland game like eastern cottontails and mourning doves. Extensive trails

which loop along the James provide an opportunity to seek out more elusive wildlife.

From early May through late September, Virginia birders head for a 14-mile pastoral locale which they call *Warbler Road*. Along this mainly unsurfaced drive, one will cross a diversity of habitats from Wildcat Mountain's valley floor to the Blue Ridge Parkway. At lower elevations be alert for hooded, Kentucky, parula, pine and worm-eating warblers. Experts suggest searching for blue-winged and golden-winged warblers in cleared landscapes. At higher levels check for black-and-white, blackburnian, black-throated blue, black-throated green, Canada, cerulean and chestnut-sided warblers.

Thomas Jefferson called a particular solid limestone arch "The most sublime of nature's works." Young George Washington surveyed it over 200 years ago. The *Natural Bridge*, one of the seven wonders of the world, rises 200 feet over Cedar Creek and interlocks two mountains via a 100-foot span. Step leisurely beneath the incredible expansion along the nature trail. Examine a 1500-year-old arbor vitae, an ancient saltpeter cave, a lost river, an underground spring and a delicate waterfall. The Monacan Indians and many Euro-Americans still hold this awesome feature in reverence.

You will notice rainbow trout, swan, deer, wildflowers and American crows as they caw from the overhead cliffs and witness the evening's dramatic kaleidoscope across the unequaled masterpiece as classical music fills the air.

The *Star City* area offers a treasure trove of accessible wildlife watching getaways. It is an invaluable natural resource to admire and share innocuously among ourselves and with other living things in multitudinous ways.

Fairview World of Plants and Animals, an elementary magnet school in Roanoke, is located on undevelopable city property in a naturally wooded area. There teachers incorporate indigenous plant and animal specimens in their lesson plans. This unusual school has nature trails and a vivarium which displays live animals and models. At nearby Fishburn Park, another elementary magnet school, instructors conduct some classes at their outdoor pond.

By its Greenways Program the City of Roanoke is developing a series of trails along the Roanoke Valley.

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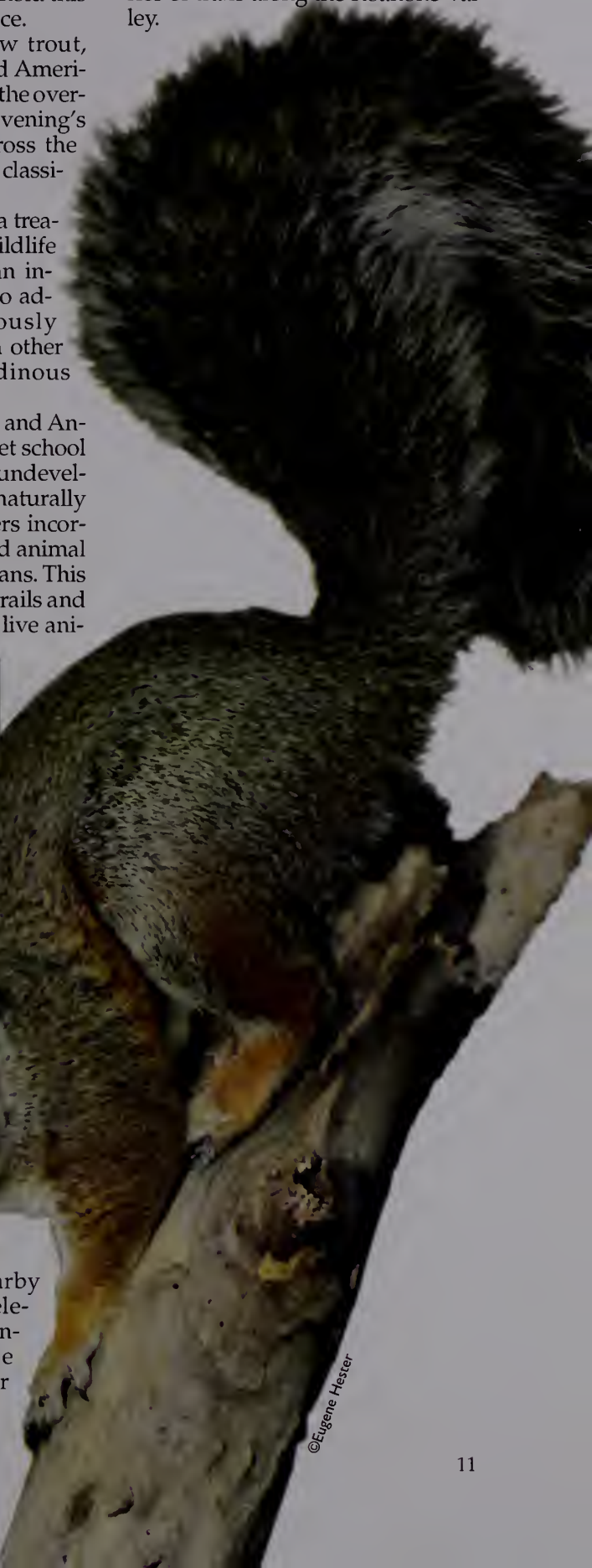
Evidence of earlier times seems to be everywhere in the Roanoke area, as seen here in a covered bridge in Giles County. Gray squirrels, like the one on the right, play an important role in the life of the woods.



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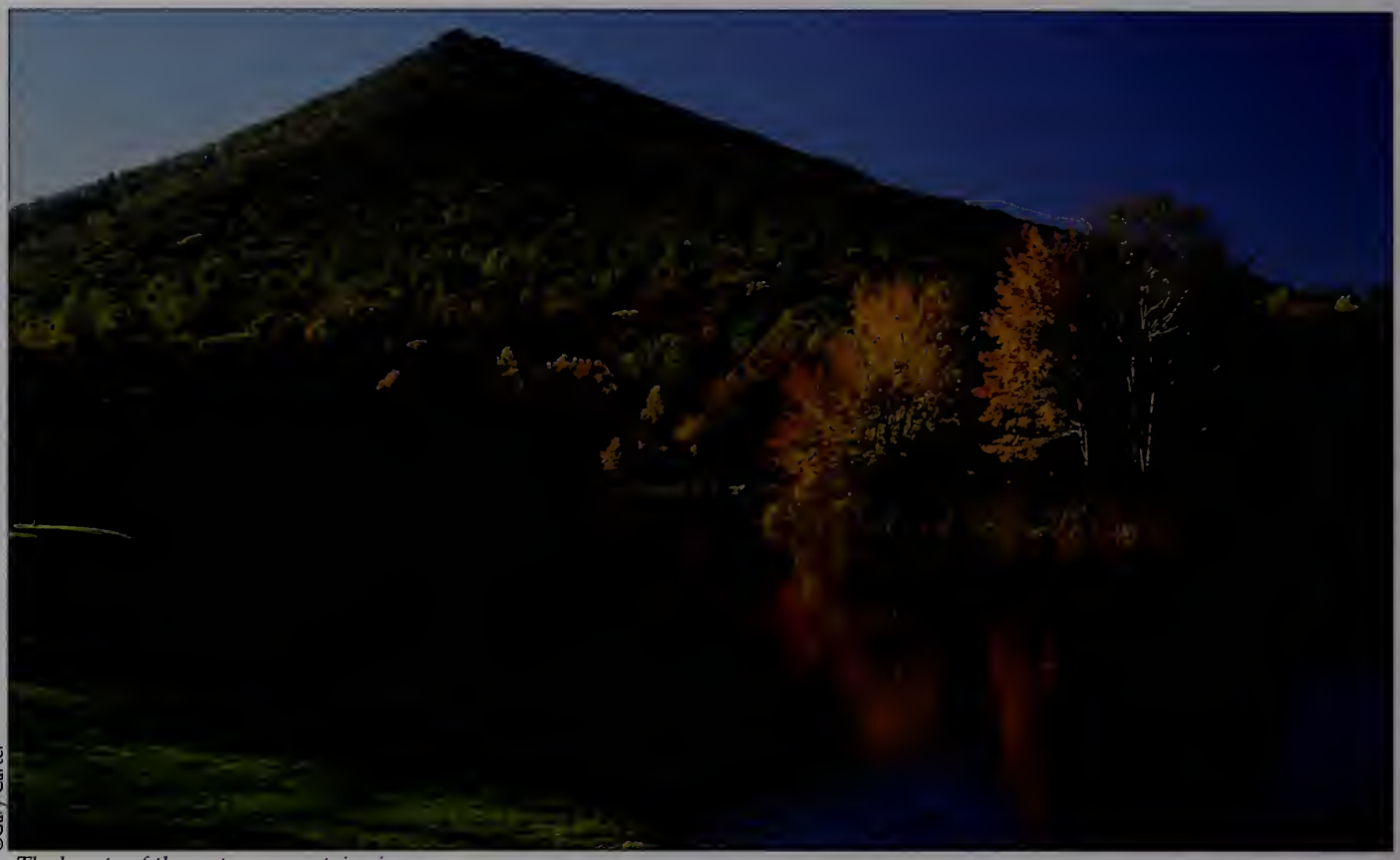

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*The beauty of the eastern mountains is everywhere in this region, as with the Peaks of Otter, **above**. Natural Bridge has always inspired Virginians, and the Hotel Roanoke is the site of the 1997 annual Watchable Wildlife Conference.*

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There pedestrians and cyclists can view hawks, mammals, wildflowers and the region's natural features.

Through its Open Space Plan, the county and cities of Roanoke, Salem and Vinton are examining how priority open spaces should be used. City and county planners are balancing ridgeline protection versus cellular towers and other visual obstructions. To encourage open spaces, experts are looking into tax breaks and conservation easements.

Wildlife watching can significantly benefit everyone including local government officials, city and county planners, tourism professionals, bed and breakfast hosts and educators. It is a sanguine means of beckoning visitors to a locale. It can be a source of exalted pride for local residents and provide an incentive to protect an area's natural state.

Besides an enormous boost to local tourism, wildlife watching demands the creation and preservation of natural areas over the entire expanse of America. This diligent land stewardship promotes species diversity and migratory corridors.

Diligent land stewardship that provides watchable wildlife opportunities can boost local tourism revenue and enhance habitat for all species. By understanding wildlife habits and habitats, we can take an active role in educating the public about how to best manage our natural resources. ☐

Emily Grey is an attorney and also a freelance writer and photographer living on the Eastern Shore.

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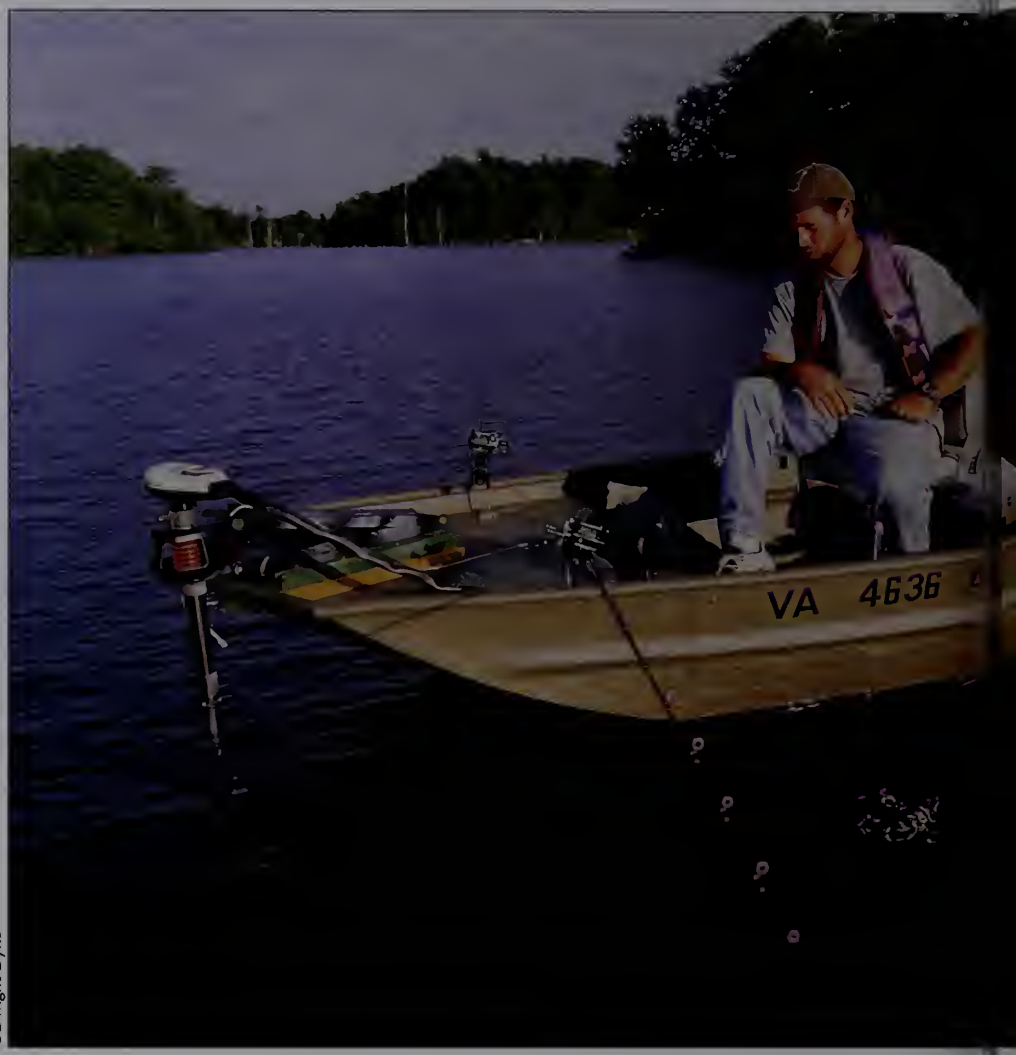
EARN YOUR
STRIPES!

Virginia has an abundance of striped bass. When water temperatures fall and the largemouth bass clam up for the winter, the stripers come alive.

by David Hart



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The face of Virginia's freshwater sport fishery, and perhaps the nation's, changed forever in the spring of 1953. That's when the first dam on the Roanoke River was completed. Fifty thousand-acre John H. Kerr Reservoir was born, and quite possibly by accident, so was one of Virginia's best sport fisheries. Three years after the floodgates of Kerr Dam were closed forever, striped bass appeared about 40 miles up the Roanoke River in the spring. They were, biologists determined, repeating the same spawning ritual they undertook before their passage from the Atlantic Ocean was blocked by Kerr Dam.

How those adult stripers got in the lake will always be a mystery, but David Whitehurst, director of policy, planning and public relations of the VDGIF, said there were only two possibilities. "They were either the result of striped bass fry stockings by the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission or more likely, anadromous fish that were trapped while on their annual spawning run up the Roanoke.

"History has shown that stockings of striped bass fry don't really work. We've learned through experience that the best results come from stocking fingerlings, which is what we do now," said Whitehurst, who was a fisheries biologist in Region II from 1974 to 1987. Much of his time was spent studying the stripers of Kerr Reservoir. "That's why I'm pretty sure those fish were the result of anadromous fish trapped behind the dam when it was completed."

He added that up until then, South Carolina's Santee-Cooper Reservoir was the only lake in the country that had a naturally reproducing population of striped bass. Kerr was the second, and to this day, stripers successfully reproduce in only a handful of lakes across the country.

"Striped bass eggs and fry need to remain buoyant for about four or five days, so they need to be released in water that moves at least one mile an hour," said Whitehurst. "That's why stripers in most lakes don't succeed when they spawn. The eggs just fall to the bottom and suffocate."

Striped bass have come a long way since they showed up in the tributaries of Kerr Reservoir—literally. Fertilized eggs are raised at the hatchery on the Roanoke River in Brookneal, at the King and Queen Fish Cultural Station in King and Queen County and also raised at the Front Royal Fish Cultural Station. From those three places, fingerling stripers (1½ to 3 inches) are transported to lakes all over the state, and in some cases, across state lines. Many of the landlocked striped bass populations in other states can trace

their roots right back to Kerr Reservoir.

Where can you find stripers in Virginia? The three biggest lakes in the state—Anna, Smith Mountain and Kerr—have these hard-fighting fish, and fisheries personnel drop young stripers into Claytor Lake, Western Branch Reservoir, Lake Chesdin, Little Creek Reservoir, Lake Prince, Waller Mill Reservoir, Lake Trashmore, Lake Meade, Leesville Lake and Lake Gaston, as well. Stocking rates vary, but average between 7 and 25 per surface acre. Some of those youngsters fall victim to piscivorous birds and gamefish, including adult stripers, but plenty survive.

Without question, 20,000-acre Smith Mountain Lake, near Roanoke is the place to go for trophy linesiders. Anglers racked up 115 citation-sized fish in 1996. The next closest body of water was Lake Gaston, where only 13 fish over 37 inches or 20 pounds (the minimum for recognition under the Department's trophy fish program) were registered from this southern Virginia reservoir. The three biggest stripers of 1996, including a 44 pound, 12 ounce monster, came from Smith Mountain. So did the state record. That fish weighed an astonishing 45 pounds, 10 ounces and was caught February 18, 1995 by Mike Rogers.

No other lake comes close to producing the huge fish that come out of Smith Mountain because no other body of water in the state offers stripers quality summertime habitat. It's that simple.

"Stripers are generally a cool-

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*Although the saltwater striper season has long been a favorite of Virginia anglers, the fun of fishing for stripers is a year-round affair for some in waters such as Lake Meade, Suffolk County, above. Some anglers use bobbers when fishing with live bait, **right**, but lures can be used effectively as well. The striper at the far right was caught with a bucktail.*

water fish," said Whitehurst. "When lakes warm up in the summer, they become lethargic and don't feed much. That's why they don't get very big in lakes like Anna and Kerr. Smith Mountain has good, deep habitat. The fish feed year-round and grow big."

Shallower lakes make up for this lack of average size by giving up good numbers of healthy fish. Lake Anna, which gets more than it's share of pressure from Northern Virginia and the Richmond and Freder-

icksburg areas, is loaded with these popular gamefish. Stripers typically weigh between three and ten pounds, but fish over 20 pounds are caught regularly, especially in the spring. In early June, 1997, the lake record was broken with a 28 pound, 12 ounce rockfish.

Most of the other stocked lakes are similar to Anna. Fish average between three and 12 pounds, but bigger fish are caught every year. A 41 pounder was caught from Western Branch in 1995.

Stripers aren't particularly difficult to catch, but for anglers unfamiliar with their habits, they can be elusive. Tactics vary, but for the most part, trolling with lures and live bait and casting to underwater points and humps are the most common methods.

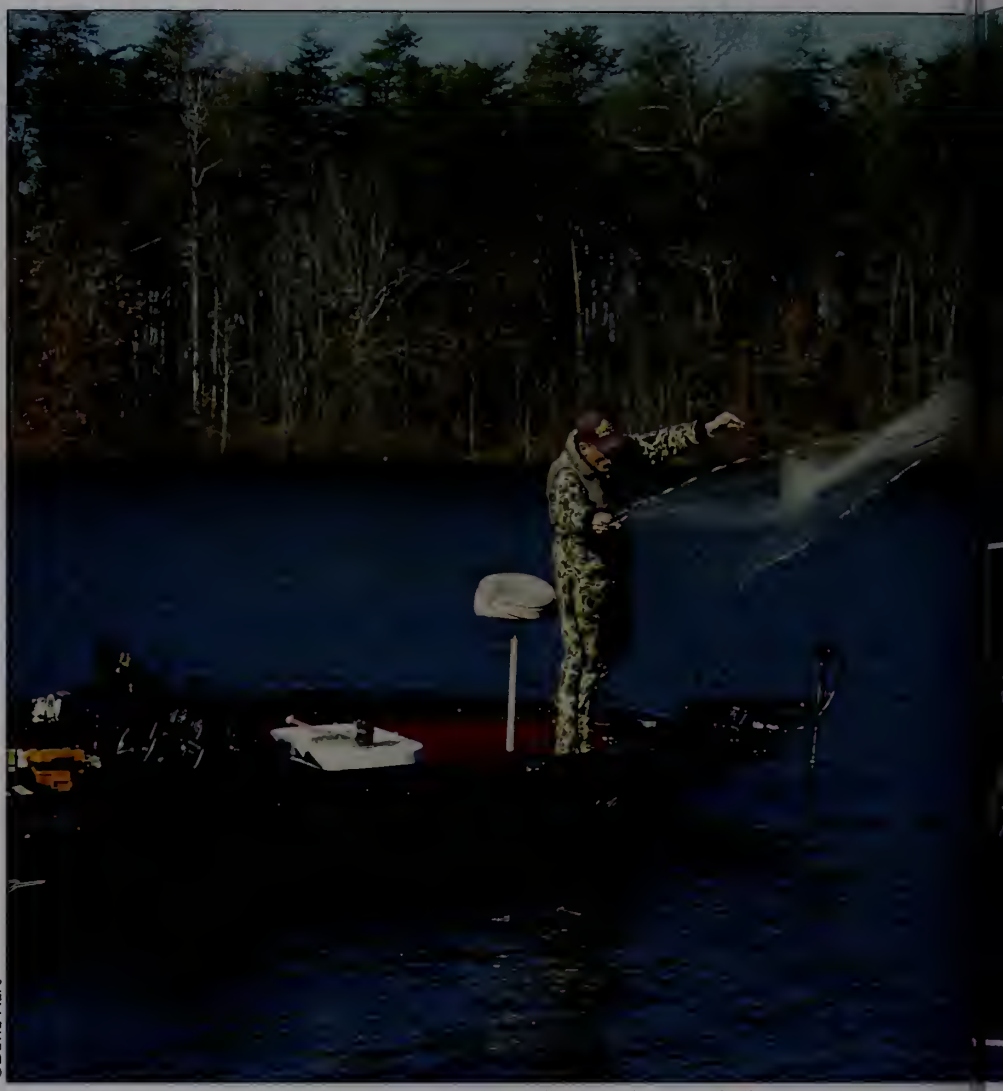
If you want to use live bait, you've got to catch it. That's not a problem for most dedicated striper anglers. They've figured out where to catch shad on a regular basis and with a little practice just about anybody can gather enough bait for a day of fishing.

When water temperatures plummet, shad school up into tight pods. Early in the morning, or on overcast days, these small baitfish rise and can often be seen flipping on the surface in larger creeks on most lakes.

Most live bait anglers look for schools of shad and herring in creeks near shore or where warmer waters mix with the cool water of the main lake. Once they locate baitfish, anglers hurl cast nets or snag them with fine-wired hooks.

"It's best to throw a cast net in low-light conditions or in stained water," said Lake Anna guide Chris McCotter. "In clear water, the baitfish can see the net and will outrun it just about all the time. I also find good concentrations of herring under boat dock lights at night and early morning. That's probably the easiest place to catch lots of bait in a short amount of time."

The other problem with live shad or herring is simply keeping the delicate little fish alive. These pelagic soft-finned baitfish need well-oxygenated, cool, clean water. Unfortunately, a standard bass boat livewell won't do the trick. That's why so many serious striper anglers invest in a 35-gallon or larger aerated bait tank and chemical water treatments to keep the bait fresh.



©David Hart

Live bait anglers catch their own shad or herring by cast netting, as seen above. Keeping the fish alive can be difficult, but well worth the effort, as anglers like the ones at right can tell you.

Dedicated live bait fishermen spend most of their time pulling a lively shad behind the boat at a snail's pace either under a float, free-lined or below a sinker. Stripers move when they hunt for a meal, but to up the odds, it's best to bring the bait to them.

McCotter uses four medium-heavy action seven-foot casting rods loaded with 17-pound line when he fishes with live blueback herring. Two are rigged with downlines, which are nothing more than a 1/2-ounce weight and barrel swivel over an 18-inch leader; two are rigged without weights. All four are kept in place by firmly-attached rod holders.

"I just put my trolling motor on the lowest setting and move through an area I know has stripers," he said. "I put the free-lined baits about 100 feet behind the boat and the downlines anywhere from 14 to 18 feet deep. I'll keep an eye on the depthfinder and look for what appears to be schools of baitfish. If the schools are broken up, which may be a sign of feeding stripers, that's even better."

He added that if he doesn't get any hits on the first or second pass,

he'll vary his speed, change the depth of his baits or break out side-planers.

"Side-planers get the bait off to the side of the boat," said McCotter. "Sometimes, stripers will shy away from a boat if it passes too close to them."

Thankfully, striped bass are easily fooled with wood, steel and plastic baits, too, although few anglers would dispute that there is no substitute for the real thing. Bucktail jigs, crankbaits, jigging spoons and surface lures all take lots of these hard-fighting gamefish.

©David Hart

Of course, the most difficult part associated with fishing for striped bass, especially for beginners, is finding the fish. Unlike largemouth bass, stripers aren't scattered throughout a lake during the course of a year and they don't hang tight to stumps, logs or other visible structure. They do, however, tend to concentrate in certain areas of a lake at certain times of the year and they are, above all, creatures of habit. Regulars often pinpoint striper locations from month to month and can return to the same general location and catch them consistently.

©Dwight Dyke

If you know little about the habits of these fish, or if you are new to a lake, don't hesitate to interrogate a lakeside tackle shop owner or marina manager. Most are willing to share as much information as they know, especially if they can hock a few lures at the same time.

If you're still lost, just scan the lake and horizon for seagulls and loons. Both types of birds rely on pelagic baitfish and follow them from one end of the lake to the other. So do stripers.

In the late fall and winter, striped bass tend to concentrate on points, near creek channels and on underwater humps and will stay around that kind of structure as long as they have a food source close by. Water temperatures in the 50 to 55 degree range are ideal, and if you can find a combination of baitfish, the "right" water temperature and good structure, you've probably found the stripers.

Occasionally, a school of these popular gamefish will give their presence away by slashing at bait on the surface. Few types of fishing can match this fast, exciting action, but it usually doesn't last very long. Approach the action quietly—these fish are super shy and will disappear at the slightest unnatural sound—and toss topwaters such as popping baits, propeller baits and even buzzbaits. If those lures don't produce a heart-stopping strike, try sub-surface, shad-imitating lures like lipless rattling crankbaits, jerkbaits and spinnerbaits. Don't hesitate; the fish often disappear as fast as they pop up.

Most of the time, however, striped bass lurk in the depths and wait for an easy meal. That's when finding these fish is most difficult. There are ways to pinpoint them, however and a good depthfinder is unbeatable.

Farmville resident Shorty Osborn keeps a constant eye on his sonar. The Kerr Reservoir guide fishes for stripers religiously from October until they complete their spawning runs in late May, and concentrates his efforts at certain depths at different times of the year. Osborn doesn't actually try to find fish with his depthfinder, instead, he looks for the "right" type of structure.

"In the fall and winter, I work both main lake points and secondary points that fall into about 12 or 14 feet of water," he said. "If there's deeper water nearby, that's even better and if there are stumps and rocks on the points, that's an added bonus. Stripers stay relatively

shallow throughout the coldest months, so that's where I spend most of my time fishing."

Osborn said the fish aren't on the same points every day, but will certainly remain in the same general area throughout the fall and winter. Some points give up fish regularly, while others surrender a striper only occasionally. Simply move from one likely looking spot to the next. Sooner or later, you'll find the fish.

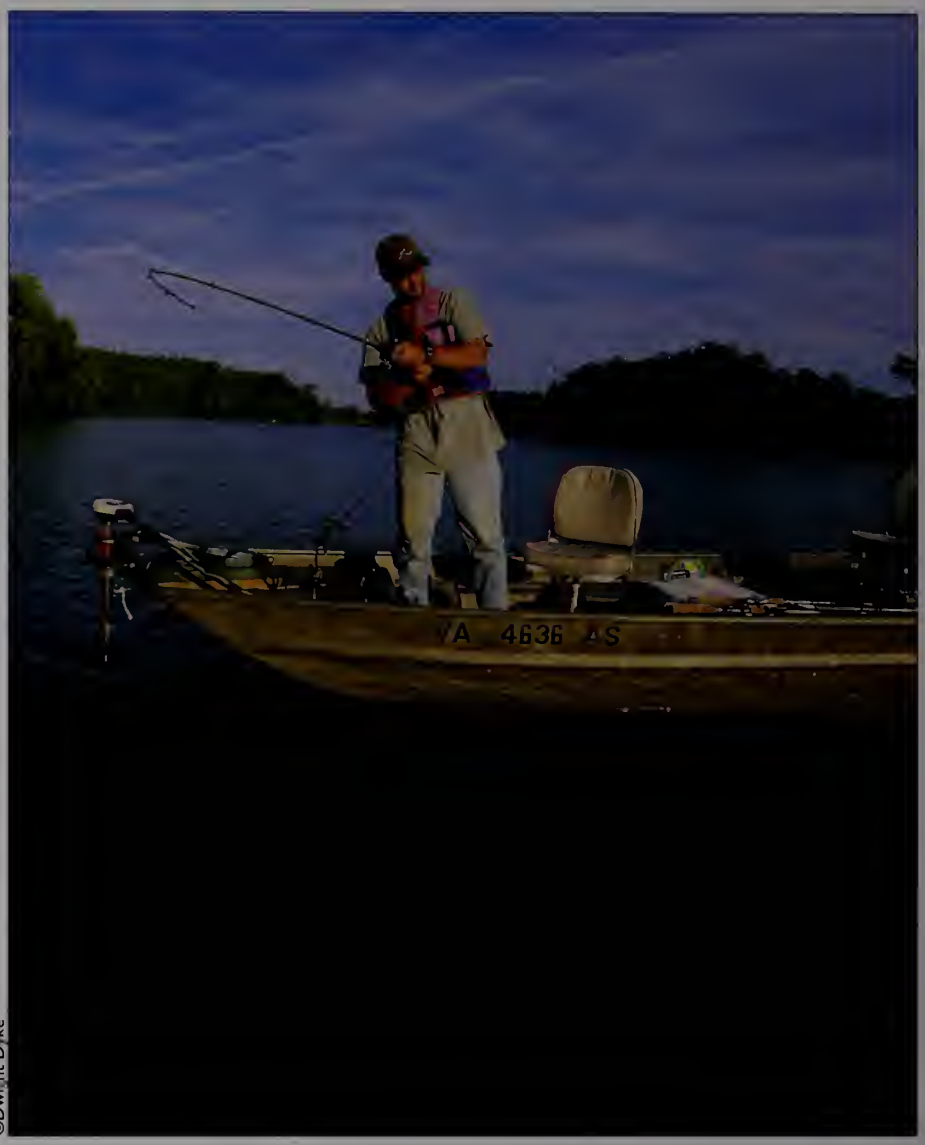
Osborn's lure of choice is his own 3/8-ounce white bucktail jig tipped with a white, six-inch plastic worm. "I tie extra deer hair on the jig so it stays in the strike zone longer. The plastic worm helps slow the lure down also and it makes the bait look bigger."

His tackle is relatively simple, also. A medium-action spinning rod, loaded with 12 pound line, is enough to handle just about any striper in Kerr. Osborn has battled and landed fish up to 22 pounds with this outfit and said anything heavier simply takes the fun out of it.

He throws the lure close to the bank and swims it back to the boat, allowing it to fall with the contour of the bottom. Occasionally, Osborn hooks fish in as little as two feet of water, but most of the time he finds them somewhat deeper.

Striped bass have indeed come a long way since they first showed up in the Roanoke River above Kerr Reservoir back in the 50's. Head for the water this autumn and a few of those fish might go even farther—into your livewell and on to your stovetop. □

David Hart is an outdoor writer for Journal Newspapers in Northern Virginia .



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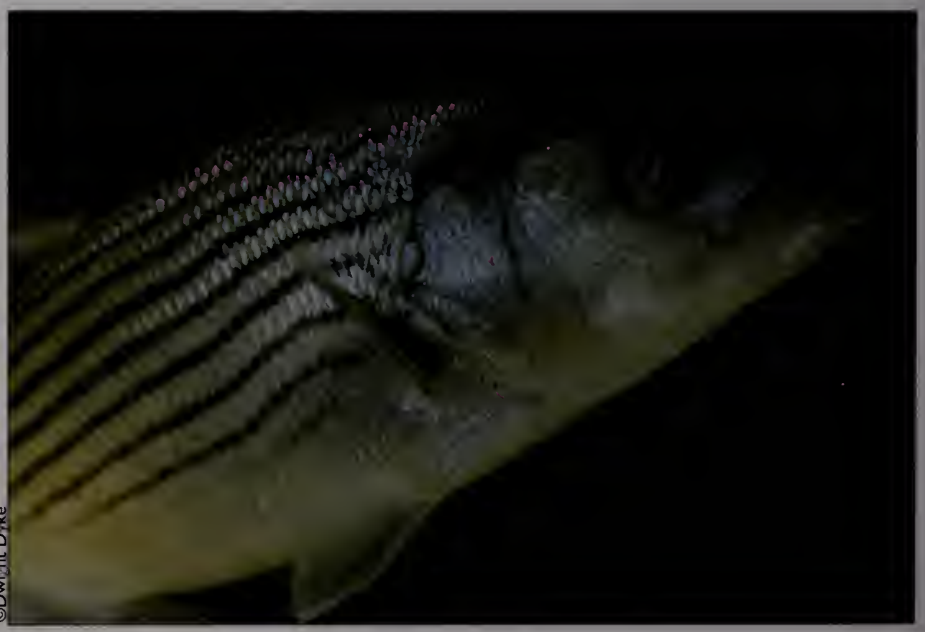

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The striper stocking program of the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries has paid dividends for anglers. Stocked waters include Lake Anna, Smith Mountain Lake, Kerr Reservoir, Claytor Lake, Western Branch Reservoir, Lake Chesdin, Little Creek Reservoir, Lake Prince, Waller Mill Reservoir, Lake Trashmore, Lake Meade, Leesville Lake and Lake Gaston.

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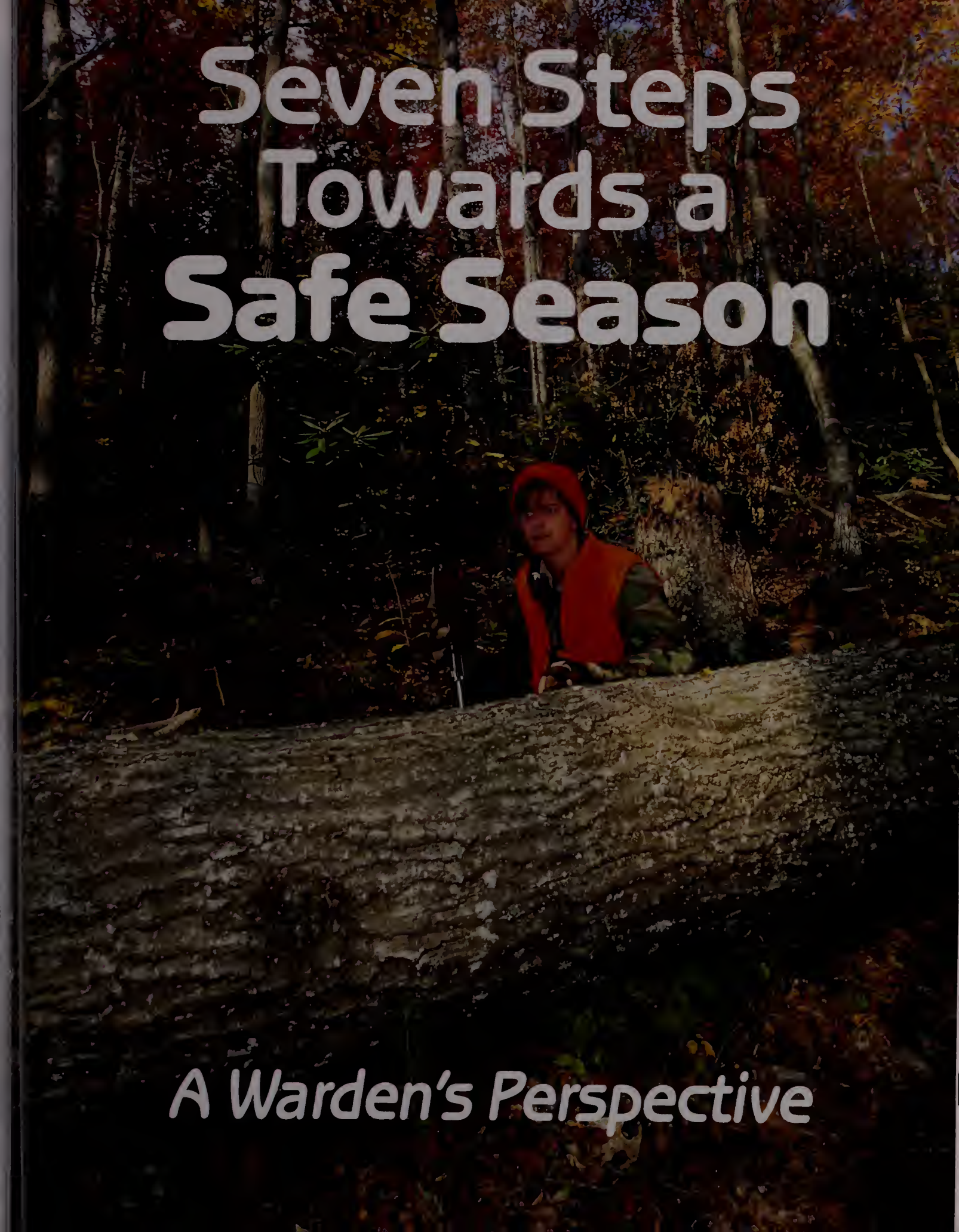
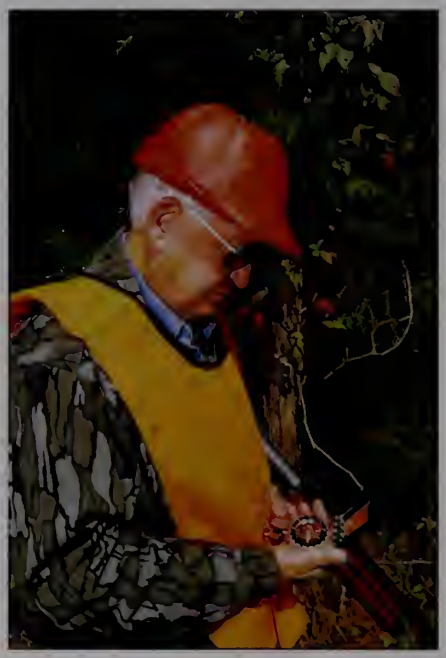
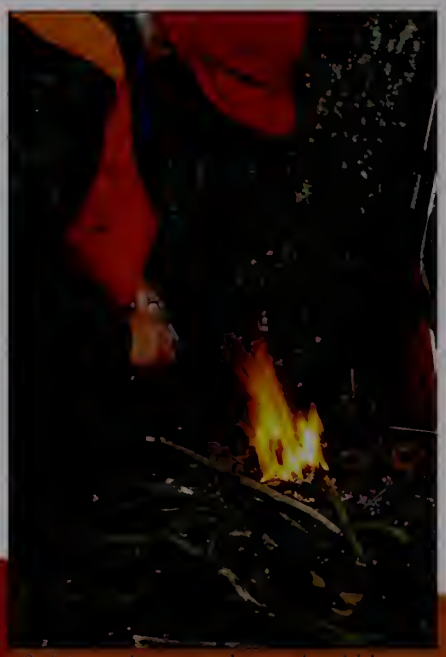
Seven Steps Towards a Safe Season



A Warden's Perspective





Safety and preparedness should be top priorities with every hunter. Knowing how to use a compass, top and having the necessary equipment and basic knowledge of survival can make all the difference.
Photos by ©Dwight Dyke

by Carol Mawyer

Autumn is here again. Cool, crisp mornings. Warm afternoons. And hunting! For many outdoorsmen and women this time of the year means shaking last year's dried mud off the camouflage coveralls and buying a box or two of shells. But from a game warden's perspective, there's much more to think about when it comes to hunting. Officer John Berry, a game warden in Orange County, shares seven common sense suggestions that can make every hunter's outdoor experience a safe one.

1. *Tell someone where you're going and when you'll be back.*

A casual remark that you'll be hunting with the guys isn't good enough. Tell a spouse, parent, or another adult the exact location of the property on which you'll be hunting. "This is especially important if you'll be hunting on private land where you won't be checked in and out," advises Officer Berry. Tell them where you plan to park your vehicle and the individuals, if any, with whom you'll be hunting. Set a "no later than" time for your anticipated return. Leaving this simple, but vital, information could save lives.

2. *Learn to use a compass*

"No matter how familiar you think you are with a track of land, everything looks different on a cloudy, snowy, or rainy day," says Officer Berry. "Without the sun for a bearing, it's easy to get disoriented." During his 25 years as a game warden, Officer Berry has participated in a half dozen or more searches for lost hunters. "Some of these guys went in [the woods] in the daylight and got turned around trying to come out. They ended up going in circles and never finding their vehicle."

3. *Know basic first aid*

Officer Berry recommends that everyone learn and take a First Responder course. "A little bit of formal first aid training can go a long way in keeping somebody from panicking," he says. "People panic when they don't know what to do." Knowing how to take care of severe bleeding, broken bones, and initial shock can help an injured person get out of the woods immediately and prevent an unnecessary night surviving until help arrives.

Packing in a first aid kit isn't necessary. "A hunter usually has enough on him to offer initial treatment for an injury," explains Officer Berry. The key is knowing how to make do with what one has. Clothing can be used as a bandage. A belt can hold a pressure bandage tight. Deer drags and rope can be used to tie splints.

4. *Examine your firearm.*

Inspect your firearm carefully before every outing. "Any mechanical device can malfunction," Officer Berry notes. Check and double check your safety. He recalled the fatality of a Culpeper County hunter who assumed his safety worked. When the experienced hunter failed to return home when expected, a search party found him dead from an accidental self-inflicted gunshot wound. Later testing of the firearm showed that an inoperable safety and a hair trigger had resulted in a deadly combination.

5. *Learn basic emergency signaling*

Signaling is known if you're lost or injured. Displaying blaze orange or waving it overhead is good signal for help. Both aircraft and passing vehicles recognize this call for assistance.

The international distress signal is three shots fired in succession. OR

[illegible] Berry recalls one incident involving a hunter and son hunting in Paris. Game Commission officers in Fauquier County used this method of signaling to summon help. Game wardens searching the area that night were quick to recognize and hone in on the crack of three rifle shots, followed by a two-minute pause, and then another three rounds. Game wardens located the sound on a compass bearing. When the pair was found, medical help was called in for the elder of the two who had had a heart attack while hunting.

Another method of emergency signaling is fire. A fire can be both seen and smelt. Wet leaves on a fire will produce lots of smoke and will draw other hunters to the area during the day. At night a fire made with dry wood will produce bright light visible from a long distance. Officer Berry recommends choosing an open field or a ridge as locations for a fire in mountainous areas because of their visibility.

6. Know when to stay put

"If you've tried unsuccessfully to locate your vehicle several times, it's dark, and you are really absolutely lost in deep woods, then it's best to pick a spot and wait for help," advises Officer Berry. "If you've done your homework prior to going hunting," said Officer Berry, "someone is going to find you because somebody's going to be looking for you."

"A prepared hunter can fit enough emergency gear in a shirt pocket to save his life," says Officer Berry. He recommends a space blanket and a pack of matches as the minimal equipment. The lost or injured hunter can start a fire for warmth, build a bed of leaves and pine tags, wrap himself in his space blanket and spend the night. "Stumbling around in the dark might cause a disoriented hunter to step into a hole and break an ankle, possibly fall into a creek and get hypothermia," he adds. "The situation could quickly go from bad to worse."

7. Wear blaze orange

Virginia state law requires all hunters to display the minimum of 100 square inches of blaze orange during the firearms deer season. However, blaze orange increases a hunter's odds for a safe hunt during all seasons by making him or her visible to other hunters.

Officer Berry sums it up nicely, "Wear all the blaze orange you can; deer are color blind." □

Carol Mawyer is a freelance writer who lives in Sandston.

Hunting the

Hunting strategy during the breeding season is simple. Just find the does, and the bucks will show up.

by Denny Quaiff

The three-quarter mile walk in the dark to my stand felt good. It was November 9 and the 1996 rutting season was heating up. The previous week of hunting had been slow as temperatures above normal. Three weeks earlier I had placed an enclosed blind in an area that had revealed a great deal of buck sign during my post season scouting trips. The cold morning air and wind conditions on this day seemed perfect for an ambush. My confidence level was high. I hoped that history would repeat itself and one of the big bucks that lived on my hunt club property would find his way to my stand.

Lee Walker

Locating your stand near a food source, like a stand of mast-producing oaks, will increase your opportunities.

©Bill Lea

Whitetail Rut

Two and one-half hours into the hunt, nothing was happening. My plan was to stay all day if necessary and take full advantage of the stand from which no one else had hunted. It has been my experience over many seasons that the most productive time for a stand in prime deer habitat is the first time it is hunted each year. Trying to stay alert and not let a deer slip by, I spotted movement to the northeast. A quick look with the binoculars revealed a fat doe that seemed to be headed to what I believed was a bedding area behind my blind. About 40 yards to the left of my stand she stopped for a second in what would be a good shooting lane if a buck were following. In less than a minute she was out of sight. It was 8:40 a.m. and I zeroed my attention back in the direction that the doe came from.

I watched and waited. Suddenly I caught a glimpse of movement on the doe's back trail. The sun was bright and the first thing that I saw with my naked eye was whitetail antlers coming in my direction. The buck's nose was on the ground and he was moving at a slow trot, right on the doe's trail. Shouldering my muzzleloading rifle I set the sights in the narrow shooting lane where the doe had stopped earlier and squeezed the trigger when he hit the opening. The big, wide rack ruttin' buck was mine. Looking at my watch it was now 9:20 a.m. All of my scouting and stand placement had paid off. This was one of the greatest thrills a whitetail hunter can experience!

When it comes to hunting whitetails you will be hard pressed not to mention the rut or breeding season in a discussion with a deer hunter. This is the time of the year when all serious deer hunters will be in the woods hunting for "Mr. Big."

To better understand the whitetail's rut, hunter's should recognize that this is a gradual process that starts in early fall, slowly releasing additional hormones into the buck's body. Whitetail bucks that have been living together since the last hunting season ended

©Bill Lea

*A buck will often throw caution to the wind during the rut, and wander out into the open. Tree rubs reveal deer behavior patterns, **top right**, and the author, **right**, exhibits the results of studying deer habits during the rut.*

will now split up and look for their own territory to establish dominance over the other males in their new range.

The first noticeable sign is the shedding of velvet from the buck's antlers. Within a few weeks the animal's neck will start to swell. As part of the annual autumn ritual the buck will start building his neck muscles by rubbing his antlers on bushes, saplings and small trees.

A mature whitetail buck is in his very best physical shape going into the rut. Through natural instinct the whitetail buck has conditioned himself like an athlete preparing for the Olympic Games. The reason for all of this conditioning is simple. Over the next several weeks a buck will have little on his mind other than finding and breeding a receptive doe.

The bucks are ready to breed before the does and start to increase their activity. Aggressive bucks start to travel much more looking for does that have come in estrus. The tremendous activity of chasing after does, fighting other bucks and breeding does leaves little time for bucks to eat. Whitetail bucks that entered the rut in superb shape quickly lose weight and energy. Wildlife biologists tell us that it is common for a buck to lose 25 to 35 percent of his body weight during this time of year.

It is very difficult to pattern whitetail bucks during the peak of the rut. The good news for hunters is that does are very predictable and satisfied to stay within their home range. Does will continue their normal daily activities, moving from their bedding to feeding areas during this time of year.

I remember a classic example of this on the second day of the general gun season a couple of years ago. The breeding season seemed to be very slow getting started and most of the rutting activity appeared to be going on at night. We had a good hardwood mast crop that year and scouting during the middle of the day revealed that the deer were feeding in the oaks.

Hunting older bucks in open oaks had not been very productive for me in the past, but the signs were there and it was the most logical place to hunt from my portable tree stand that afternoon. With only 15 minutes of legal shooting time remaining, things started to happen. Looking to the right of my tree stand, five does ran out of the pine thicket that joined the oak ridge where I had set up. While looking behind, they ran up and stopped directly under the tree I was sitting in. In a matter of seconds a 20-inch wide nine-pointer came out on the doe's trail. His neck was stretched out, head held low while making slow strides in the classic rutting mode of a mature whitetail buck. This presented an excellent target and I made a clean shot.

It is very important to have multiple stand locations throughout your hunting property. I have numerous semi-portable stands in position well before the season opens. I rely a

great deal on my portable climbing tree stand for a quick set up when food sources change or doe family units move as I described earlier. This keeps the hunter from being "pattern-able" by the deer. With multiple stand locations you will avoid setting patterns of your movement and create the element of surprise.

Hunters should know that local or regional cold weather conditions and food supply along with the overall condition of the herd may stimulate the whitetail breeding cycle. However, the one thing that is most responsible for triggering the whitetail rut is the shortening of daylight hours.

Hunting strategy during the breeding season is simple. Look for the does. If you find the does the bucks will show up. It is my opinion that the older the buck, the more does he will call on. This is mainly because he has been around longer and knows where more of them are located.

Looking back at my game check cards over the past seven years indicates that the best bucks I have harvested were taken between November 8 and 22. Until the day that these animals were harvested I had not seen them before. This brings up the point again that it is all but impossible to hunt or pattern a specific buck during the rut.

For today's deer hunter to have knowledge of rutting dates in the area that he or she is hunting may make the difference in successfully bagging a good buck. A hunter's chances at taking a trophy whitetail buck during the rut are better than any other time of the deer season.

Several years back I was hunting a clear cut pine plantation that laid between two thickets used for bedding areas. The early muzzleloader season was into its second week and I had not seen anything decent to shoot. On this particular day it had rained the night before and heavy fog had set in over the entire clear cut that morning. My visibility was only about 75 yards in any direction when a huge rack buck appeared like a ghost out of nowhere. He was headed toward me like I had him on a rope. With his head to the ground, moving rapidly and grunting, he passed my tripod stand at 30 paces when the black powder rifle roared and the .50 caliber bullet reported.

The record book buck had presented himself to me in the wide open. This area of the property I was hunting had a heavy doe concentration. Unlike the situation just a few weeks before when the buck would have only crossed the clear cut under the protection of darkness, the rut was responsible for his mistake. The rut is the one time of year when an older age buck will throw caution to the wind and present himself more openly to hunters. Besides the fact that opening day of the statewide general gun season has as many or more hunters in the woods than any other time, one would determine that the rut plays a major role in the excellent hunter success on that one day.

I used some of my hunting experiences to point out that most dyed-in-the-woods deer hunters, like myself, rely on the whitetail rut for their best opportunities. By simply paying close attention to rutting dates and hunting every chance you get during this period, a whitetail hunter can greatly increase his odds. And that's why there is nothing more exciting for deer hunters than chasing whitetail bucks during the rut. □

Denny Quaiff is executive director of the Virginia Deer Hunters Association and senior editor of their publication, Whitetail Times.

Journal

Teens score with Deer Hunters' Radford trip

by Katy Stokes

The Virginia Deer Hunters Association sponsored a field trip to the Radford Army Arsenal on September 13. It was a day meant for adventure and a day for fathers to spend quality time with their children.

Our busload of 45 fathers, sons, daughters, and even a grandmother left Richmond at midday on Saturday. We stopped along the way for a picnic, provided by the Game Department, at Claytor Lake State Park.

We arrived at the Radford conservation area in the late afternoon to look at wildlife in its natural habitat. Our group saw many deer and turkeys; at dusk we saw some huge bucks! The game officials told us how the balance in the deer population is maintained; what deer eat and how certain food plots were grown to provide a varied and nutritious diet for the wildlife.

I thoroughly enjoyed the trip and thought it was interesting to learn and see firsthand how deer, turkey and other wildlife adapt to their surroundings in the western part of Virginia. It was especially good to spend the day with my dad and to see other fathers and children enjoying the day together. A special thank you to Betsy Stinson and Bob Duncan of the Game Department for taking time to show us around the Radford Arsenal, on their day off no less! I had a great time and hope that the event will be sponsored by the Virginia Deer Hunters Association again in the future.

Katy Stokes is a 9th grader at Powhatan High School Her hobbies are art and being in the outdoors.

Lee Walker

Tom and Jacquie Colligan of Irvington, Virginia, have generously donated funds to Ducks Unlimited, Inc., that DU will use to fund the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries' portion of the Atlantic Population Canada Goose Cooperative Research Program which will study Canada geese breeding in Quebec's Ungava Peninsula. Here, from the left, with a plaque recognizing the gift, are Tom Colligan, VDGIF Director Bill Woodfin, and Jacquie Colligan.

Video Review

by Lee Walker

Southeastern Trout Streams

Well-known author of *Virginia Trout Streams*, Harry Slone has taken his writing talents and wealth of trout fishing knowledge to produce a video called *Southeastern Trout Fishing*. Viewers of this video will be given an opportunity to travel to some of the best blue-ribbon trout streams in Virginia, and then treated to some valuable information on how to fish coldwater streams. If you have already read his book then you will find this 47-minute video a perfect companion.

Don't expect the average "Me and Joe" fishing program out of this video. *Southern Trout Streams* is a first-class instructional video, giving viewers some real information that they can take to the bank. Slone not only shows you how to fish waters like freestone mountain streams, tailwaters, and spring creeks, but he has also enlisted help from noted experts like Steve Hiner, an entomologist from Virginia Tech, who discusses the primary aquatic insects on which trout feed and Dr. Harry Steeves, author of *Terrestrial*, who discusses the importance of terrestrials in a trout's diet. These are hands-on learning examples that will help the brightest of trout anglers hone his skills.

Stone, along with the award winning talents of television producer, videographer and editor, Ron Messina, have managed to bring various interesting and entertaining aspects to his video such as history lessons of the region, tying flys by streamside and stunning photography along with the sights and sounds of the Appalachians. If that weren't enough, the backgound music of old Scottish and Irish ballards performed on mandolin, guitar, and violin by Woody and Marcia McKenzie make this video a masterful production and a must for your video library.

The video can be ordered by writing: Laurel Productions, 2756 Avenul Ave. S.W. Roanoke, VA 24015. Price is 23.95 plus 2.50 shipping. □

Habitat

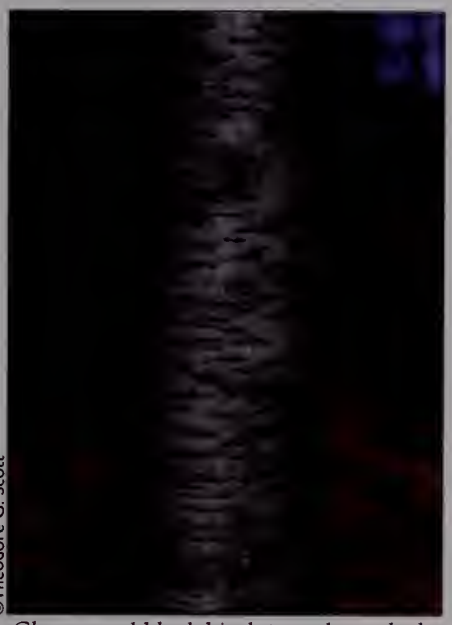
by Nancy Hugo

Sweet Birch

Cherry birch and black birch are two other common names for this native birch you'll find growing in the Appalachian mountains and western Piedmont. The first time I saw it, I was sitting on a rock near a trail overlook in Shenandoah National Park. I was attracted to it by its smooth, dark, reddish brown bark which, because it was so shiny and marked with lenticels (breathing pores), reminded me of a wild cherry. But I must have broken a twig or abraded the bark in some way because the tree announced to me that it was a birch with the fragrance of wintergreen.

It took a while for my book-learning to confirm what my nose had told me—that the essential oils in sweet birch *(Betula lenta)* are exactly the same as the essential oils in our little woodland groundcover called wintergreen *(Gaultheria procumbens)*. The latter was the original source of the wintergreen flavoring used in medicines and candy, but because sweet birch provided the oil in greater quantity and with more ease for collectors, the tree, according to biologist Rebecca Rupp, was almost wiped out in the nineteenth century. Evidently Appalachian mountaineers collected the trees by the thousands (it took 100 sweet birch saplings to produce a quart of wintergreen oil) which they reduced to chips and distilled for the oil. Lucky for the sweet birch, chemists learned how to make wintergreen oil synthetically, and it is now synthetic wintergreen oil—not the natural oil of creeping wintergreen or of the sweet birch—that is used in wintergreen flavorings.

While sweet birch prefers moist, fertile soils and is often found growing near mountain streams, it will also straddle rocks and grow on steep mountainsides where it must get a foothold in the humus between rocks. While the ones I've seen are smaller, the trees will grow to 70 or 80 feet, and one whopper, the largest one in the state according to the Virginia Forestry Association, is 92 feet tall. The tree's leaves, which turn yellow in the fall, are more or less oval with incurved teeth along the margins, and they are borne in alternate pairs along the sides of the twigs or singly near the tips. Probably the most distinguishing feature of the sweet birch (aside from its bark and aroma) is its stout (1½ inch tall by ½ inch wide) cone-like fruits which stand erect at the base of the leaf stems. (These are the tree's mature female catkins; longer male catkins dangle from the tips of the twigs.) It is between the scales of these cone-like structures that the birch's winged seeds reside, and it is these, and the tree's structure, that make it valuable to birds.



©Theodore G. Scott

Cherry and black birch trees have dark reddish brown bark, marked with breathing pores called lenticels.

According to wildlife biologist John Dennis, birches make good nesting sites for birds like orioles who suspend their nests from the trees' willowy outermost twigs and for hummingbirds, kingbirds, vireos, and goldfinches who build nests in the tree's inner twigs and branches. Birds (and squirrels) also feast on birch seeds. Some, like crossbills, pry seeds out of the cone-like fruits; others like woodpeckers, nuthatches, and goldfinches, remove seeds after the catkins have begun to open, and still others wait until wind (or their own activity) has brought the seeds to the ground. "Birds shake down ten times as much as they consume," observed Thoreau in his notebooks. Thoreau also noted what other naturalists have—that instead of releasing them all at once, birches release their seeds gradually through the winter providing "ever fresh and accessible repasts to the birds."

Sweet birch is the source of the sap from which birch beer is made, and the tree's strong wood has been used in furniture making. According to Euell Gibbons, sap from the sweet birch is only about half as sweet as that from a sugar maple, but the tree can be tapped like a sugar maple and all sorts of sweet things made from its sap. *In Stalking the Wild Asparagus*, he describes how to make birch beer which he says has "a kick like a mule" and is "definitely not suitable for children." Although it is reportedly hard to season, the wood of the sweet birch is hard, strong, and takes a fine finish; because its color deepens with age and well-kept furniture made from it looks like mahogany, sweet birch is sometimes referred to as "mountain mahogany." □

NOVEMBER Afield

by Jack Randolph

One of the neat things about November is the clothes you can wear. I don't know about you, but I like the kind of clothes we get to wear in fall and winter. Some folks can't wear wool, but I'm lucky that way. I dearly love to put on a red wool or chamois shirt, some rough wool trousers and a good pair of huntin' boots. These rough clothes mixed with the smell of moldering autumn leaves does something to my metabolism. I 'm not quite sure what it is, but I wish they could bottle it so I could take a slug of it about August when I just about have had all of summer I can take.

An outdoorsperson has to look hard to find anything wrong with November, but if there is anything it is because there is so much to do.

Early November is big for the deer hunter. The rut is peaking and hunters armed with archery tackle or black powder rifles can continue to work on outwitting that one big buck they have been watching since it started to sprout antlers last summer. Hunting with the bow or the muzzleloader is sort of "retail" hunting when a hunter can work an individual deer. When the general deer seasons open later in the month hunting is a little more "wholesale" because the deer are so stirred up you gotta take what comes your way.

This particular November has something special to offer—a whole lot of duck hunting. For the past decade or so there has only been a little duck hunting around Thanksgiving, but this year the season opens November 17 and runs through January 20. Of course, if there are any ducks here then is another matter.

One thing waterfowl hunters don't like is a full moon. Fortunately, this month the full moon, called "The Frosty Moon" or "The Beaver Moon" occurs on November 13 and it is starting to wane by the 17th when the season opens.

This month sees the opening of the first segment of the woodcock season on November 1 and rabbit season comes in November 3. The quail season opens a little earlier this year, coming in November 10. If we happen to get an early snow it will have no effect on the quail season because the regulation prohibiting hunting quail in the snow has been rescinded.

I guess, when you come right down to it, the third Monday in November, the opening day of the firearms deer season, in most of the state, is the biggest day on the hunting calendar. This year the third Monday comes on the 17th, the same day duck season opens. A lot of fellows spend considerable time getting ready for this day, especially those that have to open up and clean out the club houses, buy and stock the food and, in the east, to get the dogs in shape. For many hunters just getting to the deer camp where you can wear rough clothes and renew acquaintances with old friends is actually more important than the hunting.

As a hundred thousand or more hunters head for the deer woods scores of thousands of anglers will continue to fish, because November is special to them, too. This month the tidal water striped bass season is open and, as the water temperatures drop, the fishing gets better. There is a rule of thumb among saltwater fishermen. On the first of October water temperatures should be around 70 degrees. On the first of November they should be 60 degrees and by the first of December the water temperature should approach 50 degrees. Often, as the water temperatures drop towards the low 50s we enjoy the best striped bass fishing of the year. But stripers are not the only game in town.

November is prime time to ambush those giant chopper bluefish that are migrating south off our shores In recent years, a few highly successful anglers have chummed bluefish around the offshore wrecks in much the same manner as bluefish are chummed up in the bay.

In addition to bluefish, this is the month when the tautog fishing at the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel comes into its own. It is also a good time to fish for speckled trout at Lynnhaven and Rudee Inlets.

However, saltwater does not have a monopoly on fishing in November. Freshwater has excitement to offer, too. Early last November Briery Creek surrendered a pair of tremendous bass. One weighed 14 pounds, 10 ounces and the other went 15 ½ pounds!

November is also a prime month for big blue catfish in the James and Rappahannock rivers and it is a perfect time to catch some big pickerel in the Suffolk Lakes or perhaps a musky from the New River.

While most of the attention is turned towards the bay and the tidal rivers, landlocked striped bass are also getting restless. In addition to such old reliable striper lakes such as Smith Mountain Lake, Lake Gaston and Buggs Island Lake, some newer waters are starting to produce some nice fish. Watch for such lakes as Anna, Chesdin and Little Creek Reservoir at Toano to make significant contributions to the fishing for landlocked stripers.

November is a month of opportunity for the outdoorsman. For some it is a month of football on television or tailgate parties at the stadiums. All of this is fun, too, but in November the sound of distant shots, the smell of burnt powder, and choir of hound music or the exciting calls of migrating geese are the sounds of my youth and I am re-born again. □

Recipes

By Joan Cone

The Best Tasting Bird In Virginia!

Of all the upland birds hunted in Virginia, ruffed grouse take the prize. They are the upland birds which are flavorful, moist and tender. Because the meat is not dry or tough, the breasts can be prepared like chicken. The recipe which follows requires skinned, boned breast meat.

Menu

Oyster Dip
Curried Grouse
Broccoli And Avocado Salad
Pineapple Cranberry Upside-Down Cake

Oyster Dip

1 pint oysters, drained
2 packages (8 ounces each) cream cheese, room temperature
6 tablespoons mayonnaise
2 tablespoons onion juice
8 to 10 slices of cheese, chopped (any type)

In a medium bowl, mix together the cream cheese, mayonnaise, onion juice and chopped cheese. Fold in oysters and place mixture in an oven casserole. In a preheated 350° oven, heat mixture for 15 minutes or until it bubbles. Serve with crackers or small rye bread.

Curried Grouse

1 Reynolds Oven Bag, large size (14 x 20-inches)
2 tablespoons flour
1 can (14 ½ ounces) stewed tomatoes
¼ cup raisins
2 tablespoons packed brown sugar
1 teaspoon curry powder
½ teaspoon salt
1 pound skinless, boneless ruffed grouse breast meat, cut in 1-inch pieces
Hot cooked rice

Preheat oven to 350°. Shake flour in oven bag and place in a 13 x 9 x 2-inch baking pan. Add tomatoes, raisins, brown sugar, curry powder and salt to oven bag. Blend ingredients in bag with a plastic or wooden spoon. Add grouse pieces to bag. Turn oven bag to coat grouse with sauce. Arrange ingredients in an even layer in oven bag Close bag with nylon tie; cut six ½-inch slits in top. Bake until grouse is tender 35 to 40 minutes. Serve over hot cooked rice. Makes 4 servings.

Note: To make this a low sodium dish, omit salt and use no salt stewed tomatoes.

Broccoli and Avocado Salad

1 ½ pounds broccoli
1 avocado, pitted, peeled and cut into cubes
1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice
½ cup pecans, coarsely chopped

Dressing

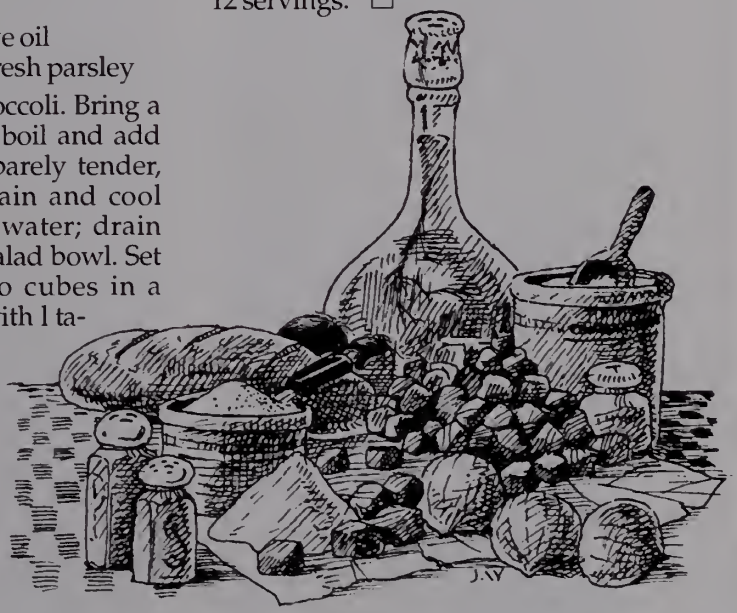
1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice
1 tablespoon Dijon mustard
Salt to taste
¼ cup extra virgin olive oil
1 tablespoon minced fresh parsley

Cut florets from broccoli. Bring a saucepan of water to boil and add florets, boiling until barely tender, about 3 minutes. Drain and cool under cold running water; drain again and place in a salad bowl. Set aside. Place avocado cubes in a small bowl and toss with 1 tablespoon lemon juice. Add avocado to broccoli and add pecans. In a small bowl stir together 1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice, Dijon mustard and salt to taste until well mixed. Add olive oil and parsley and stir vigorously until blended. Pour dressing over salad, toss gently and serve. Serves 4.

Pineapple Cranberry Upside-Down Cake

½ cup butter or margarine
1 cup firmly packed brown sugar
½ cup pecan or walnut halves
1 cup fresh cranberries
1 can (15¼ ounces) chunk pineapple in juice, drained, juice reserved
1 package (18 ¼ ounces) yellow cake mix

Melt butter in a 13 x 9-inch baking dish in a 350° oven. Sprinkle with sugar, nuts, cranberries and pineapple. Add water to reserved juice to equal the amount of liquid specified on cake mix package. Prepare cake mix as package directs. Spread cake mixture over fruit. Bake at 350° for 35 to 40 minutes or until cake tests done. Cool 5 minutes and then invert onto a large serving dish. Makes 12 servings. □



Safety

by Kathy D. Gillikin, Boating Education Specialist

Putting the Heat on Hypothermia

There you are about an hour into your hunting, fishing or boating trip and you realize you should have thrown in that extra jacket or hat. It's cccold!!! Now what do you do?

Or...suddenly you fall overboard. Now you are cold...and wet!!

Cold air, and particularly cold water, can be incapacitating and deadly if you are not prepared. Before you head outside this fall and winter, plan in advance the best way to avoid a dangerous condition such as hypothermia, which is the extreme cooling of the body's core temperature.

Stages of Hypothermia

By the time a person experiences the first stages of hypothermia, there is very little time before the condition becomes life-threatening. The stages of hypothermia include uncontrollable shivering, apathy, loss of consciousness, decreasing heart rate and breathing, and eventually if not treated...death.

Every person's body reacts differently to the cold. Therefore dressing in layers for the weather and water temperature is essential for adjusting correctly to your individual needs. Air or water temperatures do not have to be below freezing for hypothermia to be threatening. Hypothermia can result even on mildly cool days if the exposure to cool air or water is for an extended time.

Symptoms

Hunters, anglers and boaters need to know the symptoms of hypothermia, which are listed below.

- Blue lips and fingernails
- Uncontrollable shivering
- Numbness of body extremities
- Weakness
- Dizziness
- Confusion
- Slurred speech
- Impaired vision
- Impaired judgement

Treatment for Hypothermia

Once a person has any of these symptoms, action should be taken quickly. First you will want to remove the victim from the cold water or cold air if possible. Remove any wet clothing and wrap the person in dry clothes or blankets. It is important to let the body warm up gradually to avoid damaging the heart. Warming the victim in a heated car or near another source of heat is vital to survival. Heating pads can be applied to the victim over blankets or clothing to avoid burns. Chemical heat packs or hot water bottles are other good sources of heat. Warm liquids can be given to the victim if she/he is alert.

Never rub the victim's skin or give the victim alcohol. Alcohol will bring the blood vessels to the surface of the skin and actually cool the body more quickly. Medical conditions which impair the circulatory system, such as cardiovascular disease and diabetes, make a person more susceptible to hypothermia.

Prevention

The best way to avoid the dangers of hypothermia is to plan ahead. Try not to go outside during the coldest times of the day. Dressing in layers will allow you to adjust for the changing outdoor temperatures. If you plan on being near water, dress for the water temperature, not the air temperature. Wear a cotton layer next to your skin to help your skin breathe. Cotton absorbs moisture and encourages the circulation of air. Polyester and wool layers should be worn on top of the cotton layer to trap and hold heat, even when wet. An outer layer of a windproof and waterproof fabric will discourage moisture and cold air from seeping in.

The major heat loss areas of the body include the head, the underarms and the groin. Hands and feet are particularly vulnerable since the heart has to work harder to pump the blood to these distant areas. The smart layering of clothing will protect the underarms and groin. It is extremely important to protect the head which loses the most heat in cold temperatures. Wearing a wool blend hat will keep your head sufficiently warm.

Wearing too many layers is a common problem for many sports activists. Donning several layers in combination with high activity may cause the circulation to slow or possibly stop. In this case, the body will actually get colder because the layers are pressing tightly against the body during movement and preventing the blood from warming the extremities. Loose layers of quality fabrics work best to keep you warm. You will want to remove or add layers as the temperature changes.

You can also plan ahead by maintaining your physical fitness and providing fuel for the inner energy/heat source: your body. Eat a nutritious meal prior to going out into the cold. Take some food and water with you to eat and drink during your trip. Eating occasionally will replenish your body's natural inner heat. Staying in shape will help your circulatory system, heart and muscles work efficiently and effectively. By preparing for your cold weather sport, you will gain the physical and mental benefits without adding the risk of hypothermia. ☐

Photo TipS

By Lynda Richardson

A Photographer's Holiday Wish List

The holidays are just around the corner and I'm in big trouble, as usual. I haven't bought anything. But I have pulled together a selection of gift ideas for the outdoor photographer in your life...ideas of things I personally would like to find under my Christmas tree. (Hint, hint.)

Photographers always need more lens cleaning tissue, batteries, and film but I'll bet many don't realize the need for warming filters. I've found that a collection of 81A filters is an excellent addition to any camera bag. An 81A filter is a glass screw-in filter that slightly "warms" the recorded scene. These filters are especially helpful when shooting in open shade or with electronic flash. Price wise these filters cost from $15 -$250 depending on their quality and size. (I could always use a few more in 52mm, 55mm & 72mm.)

How about a subscription to a gorgeous, new outdoor photography magazine? *Nature's Best* has been so well received that it has gone quarterly and is now selling subscriptions. For a limited time, you can sign up your photographer as a charter member for just $19.97. Subscribe now and get the Fall 1997 issue. Simply send a check to: *Nature's Best*, P.O. Box 10070, McLean, VA 22102. (I've already sent in my subscription.)

Does your photographer want to professionally sell photographs to magazines, ad agencies and big corporations? Then they must know how to price their images. The newest, fourth edition of *Negotiating Stock Photo Prices* by Jim and Cheryl Pickerell has hit the presses and will answer pricing questions on everything from web site uses, annual reports, billboards, greeting cards, to overseas sales. I always refer to my Pickerell book for pricing. To order, send a check for $30 plus $4 shipping to Jim Pickerell, 110 Frederick Ave., Suite A, Rockville, MD 20850 or call (301)251-0720 or fax (301) 309-0941 or e-mail: order@chd.com. Visa and Mastercard are accepted. (I could use the fourth edition.)

Books, books, books, my favorite holiday gift. This year offers an incredible line up of sensational wildlife oriented photography books. Hailed as one of the finest nature photographers working today, Frans Lanting's work has been featured in virtually every major magazine the world over. In his newest book, *Eye To Eye: Intimate Encounters With The Animal World*, Lanting has outdone himself. This 25 year retrospective combines 140 powerful full color images with personal stories and observations from a lifetime of work with wild animals around the globe. This book is *the* wildlife photography book of the century! (I don't think I can wait until Christmas for this one!) *Eye To Eye*, is available at bookstores or you can order it for $39.99 from the publisher Taschen America by calling toll free at (888) 827-2436.

The National Geographic Society has produced two great nature and photography oriented books this year. *Hunting With The Moon: The Lions Of Savuti* was written and shot by husband/wife team Dereck and Beverly Jourbert. This incredibly talented couple are famous for their film coverage of the African night featuring the lives of lions. (Check out the Jourbert's NGS videos *Lions of Darkness* and *Eternal Enemies*.) Their incredible photography will arrest your soul. NGS member price is $29.95. (I don't have this one yet!)

Want to know how National Geographic writers and photographers get through those tough magazine assignments? Read along with *National Geographic On Assignment USA* and discover whether you really want to leave your day job. NGS member price is $34.95. For more information about obtaining these wonderful books, call NGS toll free at 1-888-225-5647. (I really need this one too!)

Surprise your photographer with a trip to the Amazon! In a riverboat that would make Humphrey Bogart envious, photograph pink dolphins, parrots and incredible scenery as you travel along this mysterious river. Climb high into the forest canopy on a suspended foot bridge for close encounters with monkeys, frogs and butterflies. The Friends of the National Zoo (FONZ) have asked me to lead this exciting 8-day expedition into Peru. Pack your bags for an October 3, 1998 departure. For additional information, please call Terry Lubar at the National Zoo at (202) 673-0270.

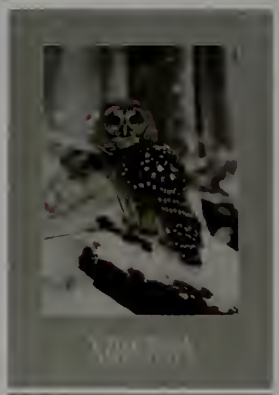
I hope this list will be as helpful to you as it will be for me. (Now I don't have to make up a Christmas list for my family!) Good luck on your search for the perfect gift and happy holidays!

News You Can Use

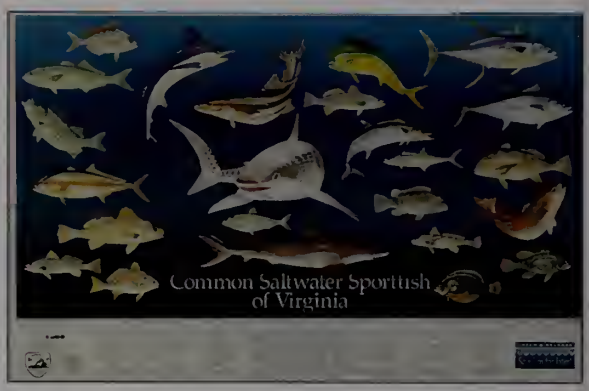
The North American Nature Photography Association (NANPA) is having it's next annual forum on January 14 - 18, 1998 in Haines City, Florida. For more information call: NANPA at (303)422-8527, (303)422-8894 (fax) or write to NANPA's Fourth Nature Photography Forum, 10200 W. 44th Ave., Suite 304, Wheatridge, CO 80033-2840 or e-mail to nanpa@resourcenter.com. Better hurry as this event sells out fast! I hope to see you there! □

Virginia Wildlife

Just $8 each. Specify: freshwater game fish (21"X 36"), wood duck, barred owl, white-tailed deer (all 19 ½" X 27 ½"), saltwater fish (21 ¾" X 34").
Make check payable to: Treasurer of Virginia and send to: Virginia Wildlife Poster Offer, VDGIF, P.O. Box 11104, Richmond, VA 23230-1104.



VIRGINIA WILDLIFE POSTERS



"Winter Comfort" by Bob Henley, a signed and numbered limited edition (950) print 13" X 19 ½". $45.00 each.

Make check payable to Treasurer of Virginia and send to "Winter Comfort" VDGIF, P.O. Box 11104, Richmond, VA 23230-1104.

BAT POSTER

The attractive poster, Bats of the Eastern United States (24" X 36"), is only $10. Includes information about each species found in the eastern United States. Checks should be payable to the Treasurer of Virginia, care of Mary Beth Murr. Order from Ray Fernald at the Nongame Program, Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, P.O. Box 11104, Richmond, VA 23230-1104.

THE 1997-1998 DUCK PRINT

1997 Virginia Waterfowl Stamp Print by Roger Cruwys. Chocolate Labrador retriever with pintail. Overall size 12" X 14". For information on this limited edition print call Sport'en Art, 1-800-382-5723.

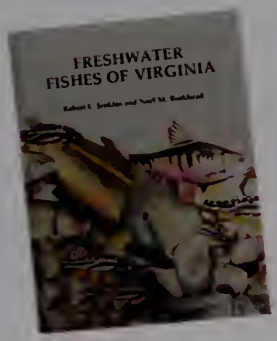
Gift Catalog

LICENSE PLATES

Now you can proudly display your support of the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries with our white-tailed deer, largemouth bass, mallard or brook trout Wildlife Conservationist license plates. Available from the Department of Motor Vehicles. Sales proceeds will benefit VDGIF's efforts to conserve and manage fish and wildlife populations today—and tomorrow.

BOOKS

The Reptiles of Virginia
by Joseph C. Mitchell. $40 plus $2.25 each postage and handling. This is the first complete catalogue of Virginia's snakes, lizards, and turtles. Featuring 63 full-color illustrations, distribution maps and easy-to-use identification keys in 384 pages. Order from: Smithsonian Institution Press, Blue Ridge Summit, PA 17294-0900. Call toll-free 1-800-782-4612.



Freshwater Fishes of Virginia
by Robert E. Jenkins and Noel M. Burkhead. $85. This authority on Virginia's fishes takes an in-depth look at 210 fish species. Over 1,000 pages with 40 color plates. Order from: Virginia Chapter, American Fisheries Society, c/o VDGIF, P.O. Box 996, Verona, VA 24482. Make checks payable to VA Chapter, AFS.

BOUND VOLUMES

Virginia Wildlife 1996, $15.00.
In one handsomely bound volume, you can have all 12 issues of *Virginia Wildlife* at your fingertips. A ready source of information and reference material for young and old.
Order from:
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Make checks payable to:
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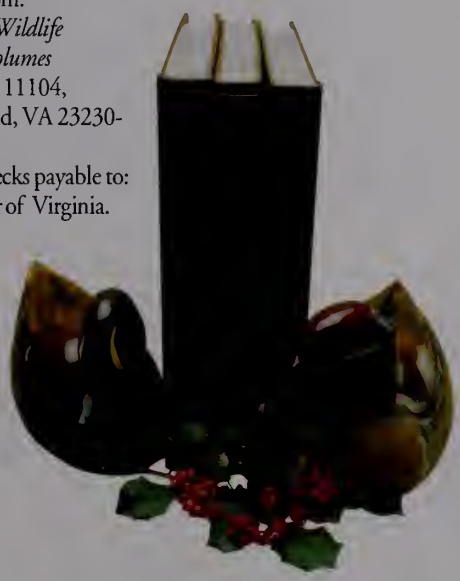


ANGLER HOW-TO KITS

Beginning Angler or *Bass'n Basics*. $15 each. The perfect gift for the promising young anglers and their families, *Beginning Angler* includes a 30 minute video, an 18-page color identification guide of freshwater game fish, a full-color poster of Virginia's sport fish, a pocket field guide to fishing lakes and reservoirs, a coloring book, a bumper sticker, and more. *Bass'n Basics* targets the intermediate angler seeking to learn more about the challenges of fishing for largemouth bass. Includes a 2-hour video, tips and techniques guide, full-color freshwater sportfish poster, boating information, and more. Order either kit from VDGIF, Aquatic Education Coordinator, P.O. Box 11104, Richmond, VA 23230-1104. Make checks payable to Treasurer of Virginia.

Denny Martin

Spring Awakening

Denny Martin

Inspired by the Cooperative Alleghany Bear Study (CABS), the nature of the black bear *(Ursus americanus)* is depicted in "Spring Awakening" by artist Carolyn German Hall. Virginia's nationally-recognized research on Alleghany Mountain bear populations is a joint venture among the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, Virginia Tech, and the U. S. Forest Service. Through the CABS work, our emerging understanding about bears in Virginia will ensure the conservation of this magnificent animal into the 21st century.

Successful conservation programs are costly, and the CABS work is no exception. Despite the generous contributions that already have been made by other government agencies, private industry, sportsmen groups and conservation organizations budgets remain tight. It has been no small task to capture, mark, and release several hundred bruins since the study's initiation in 1994. Today, many of these bears are still being monitored with radio-telemetry equipment.

In 1996, Carolyn assisted Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (VDGIF) biologists with the trapping of a CABS study bear. The opportunity to see and help process a live bear reinforced her admiration for the largest of Virginia's carnivores and deepened her respect for the dedicated VDGIF and Virginia Tech staff conducting the work.

Carolyn wanted to contribute to the CABS project and to one of the Commonwealth's greatest legacies. To do so, she has painted a sow bear with two cubs just as they emerged from a winter sleep in a small cave where the cubs were born. Normally producing two per litter, a sow can give birth to as few as one or as many as five cubs. Carolyn felt that this scene most closely rendered her vision of this great animal. Just as a mother bear nurtures her cubs, Carolyn has exhibited similar care for all bears through her generous donation of "Spring Awakening" to the Cooperative Alleghany Bear Study!

Wildlife has been the subject of much of her work. Living on a wooded knoll near Lexington in Rockbridge County, she and her husband awaken to deer and wild turkeys in their front yard. Song birds, squirrels and other small animals are frequent visitors. Her work also has been featured in the May, 1991 issue of Virginia Wildlife.

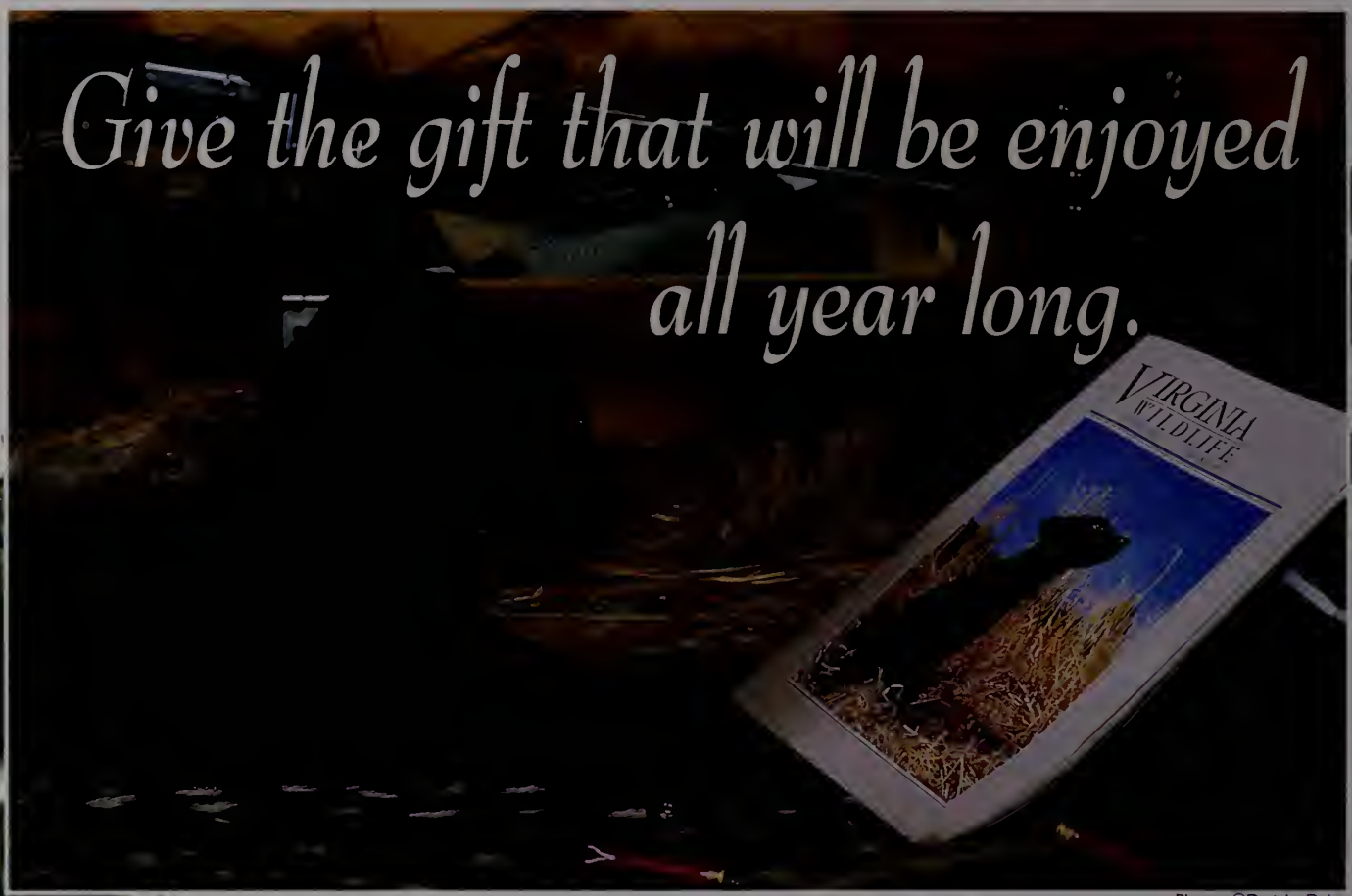
Through the purchase of a print (16"x20"), you can help Carolyn, sportsmen, and conservationists throughout Virginia ensure the future of black bears. *Signed and numbered prints are available for $95. For the collector, remark prints will be available for $125.* Proceeds from the sale of this print will be donated directly to the CABS project. This is the first edition of prints to be produced by the CABS project to help support the important work on Virginia's black bear population. These valuable and very collectable prints will be available in early November, 1997. You can show your support of *Ursus americanus* and receive one of these excellent prints by sending your check now. They would make an excellent Christmas gift. To order, please make out your check to the "Virginia Tech Foundation - CABS" and send it to Dr. Michael Vaughan, Dept. of Fish & Wildlife Sciences, Cheatham Hall, VPI&SU, Blacksburg, VA 24061-0321.

©Dwight Dyke

Hunting is Vital to Wildlife Management

We all appreciate law abiding hunters who play by the rules. They have a healthy respect for the game they pursue, and they pay for management efforts. Every hunting license helps fund wildlife management, as do the excise taxes on hunting equipment.

Game wardens also contribute to wildlife management by encouraging and ensuring compliance with the laws governing wildlife management. A friendly license check, such as the one performed here by Game Warden Patrick Popeck during early dove season, puts hunters in personal contact with the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries. Conscientious game wardens let the sportsmen and women of Virginia know that we're committed to all aspects of wildlife management.



Photos ©Dwight Dyke

Virginia Wildlife Magazine

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